

# SCOTTISH POEMS

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BY D. HERSCHE



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# SOUL TOYS

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Soul Toys

# SOUL TOYS

BY  
ALVIN D. HERSCH  
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TO  
TWO BEAUTIFUL SOULS  
CARRIE AND BLANCHE  
IN LOVING THANKFULNESS FOR  
THE DEVOTION, COMPANIONSHIP, AND  
LOVE THEY SHOWERED UPON  
ME DURING THEIR SHORT  
SOJOURN ON THIS  
EARTH

In the WHIRLPOOL of FATE, the immortal SOUL like an impassive Buddha, regards its playthings: Men and Women sinking in the water's swirl to a bottomless pit of unsatiated desires; rising on the waves of attained wishes; circling through Birth, Love, Marriage, Divorce, Death, back to Birth again; dashing one against the other! Strange encounters! Wives and mistresses—Nuns and prostitutes—Priests and libertines—Saints and sinners! SOUL TOYS for the Unborn!

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“Let us pay with our bodies for our souls’ desire!”

—*Theodore Roosevelt.*

PART I  
THE WORLD OF PASSION



# SOUL TOYS

## CHAPTER I

NEW YORK and Paris, twin capitals in the World of Passion! Ever producing and molding world citizens, and bowing allegiance only to King Passion and Queen Love!

In the process of being molded, Clare Emerson sat on the edge of a table in the palm-fenced tea room of the Hotel Modore, lightly swinging her silken-clad limbs and daintily puffing a cigarette, held to her lips as though a rose whose fragrance she was enjoying, and gazing out into the busy lobby. Her blue spangled evening gown seemed part of her slight but well rounded figure, with its crown of bobbed golden hair. Her blue eyes danced merrily as she turned to her companion, uptilting her peach-like cheeks and small, perfectly formed features.

"You are hardly dressed to take me anywhere," she murmured, as though answering a remark of the man beside her.

The latter looked down at his loose fitting Norfolk outing suit and his white shoes, then felt his soft collar. He was tall and broad shouldered; muscular but slender and well knit. As he straightened himself, he looked the typical athlete.

"I guess you are right," he gave reluctantly the result of his observation, "but I never think much about clothes. Clare, do they make such a difference?"

"Now, Jean Wildner, you know I would be the laughing stock of all New York, if I went with you to the theatre in

that outfit—not that I care," the girl added hastily, "but there are certain conventions to which one must conform, certain things that simply aren't done."

As she smiled, his bronzed face with its arched brows, serious, penetrating eyes, and sensitive mouth, seemed good-naturedly to speak rebellion at these social necessities, like an overgrown boy who begs for long pants. He shook his head in annoyance, his thick light hair tumbling about.

"You do not seem to live up to them yourself," he pointed to her cigarette, "I can't see why we must recognize the silly rules of past generations. We live to-day, why not govern our own selves?" he spoke with conviction, more asserting than questioning.

"Really, smoking is quite proper nowadays," she insisted, smiling still, "but your little speech might have come from your brother's stock. He always uses it against my protest at his 'kiss me,' his usual demand even in public places. I almost have to hold him off at arm's length. He too, says, 'What do we care for conventions?' but in a little stronger language. Anyway, I couldn't go with you to-night, because I promised Cornie to see how fast he can drive his new Mercer. But truly if you were dressed now I might have run away and played with you—but here he comes with his body-guard." She turned to the men approaching with a hearty, "Hello boys! How are the Heart-Mates to-night?"

Cornelius M. Wildner, Jr., in an immaculate tuxedo, flanked on either side by his ever attendant friends, James Vanduyn, familiarly called Jim, and Edward Philbrick, known as Eddie, came toward the couple. As if trained in a chorus, together they said, "Glad to see you Clare,—how are you, Jean?"

"Where is Clay?" asked Clare. "You know when I christened you the Heart-Mates, I expected you always to be together. And how are the Soul-Mates?" she asked as she turned to Jean.

"They are waiting for their *ex-officio* member to attend a meeting," he said laughingly.

"One has to be invited you know," was her answer, "because I am the name-giver does not give me free admission."

"Look at the devil!" Eddie exclaimed as he pointed to Cornie. The latetr had a habit of passing his hands repeatedly through his hair when he was annoyed or excited, and his bushy black locks, parted carefully in the center, when fluffed up looked like two horns. He glanced into a nearby mirror and smoothed his disheveled hair.

"Take you choice, Clare; the devil," Eddie gave Cornie a thump on his back, "or the saint," as he did the same to Jean. "They both fall, sooner or later."

Clare was annoyed at the way Jean was being embarrassed and felt that it was because she was with him. Turning to him she said, "Now run along, this is the night that I have been asked to attend the meeting of the Heart-Mates, so good-bye."

At once, with a nod to the others and a wave of the hand as he approached the door, Jean left the hotel.

Hardly had he departed when Jim blurted out, "I don't see how you can pay any attention to that boob, Clare. He is too highbrow for me."

"Remember he is my brother," interjected Cornelius. "And if he is odd, I will not stand for any talk like that about him."

"He has observed the golden rule, till he's become the golden fool," Eddie contributed scornfully.

"You poll-parrot!" was the epithet Cornie angrily threw at him.

"Now boys, stop your quarreling. You know Jean is a perfectly dandy fellow, and I like him ever so much," asserted Clare. "But where are you going to take me this

evening, or are we going to stay here all night discussing Jean's personality?"

"I beg your pardon, Clare," said Cornelius, "we believe we have planned a very pleasant evening, the boys are going to meet Horto and Tillie; later, Clay is going to bring his sister, and we are all going to run down to Long Beach and dance, and you will have a chance to see how my Mercer acts."

"How wonderful!" enthused the girl; "I will hurry upstairs, get my cape and be ready in a moment."

After she had left them, Jim said to Cornie, "Your brother seems to have a stand-in; if you aren't careful, he will cut you out."

"I am not afraid," was the quiet reply; "but I can't understand what she sees in him. He bores me to death, for all he talks about is soul desires, perfection of mind, and Hell knows what!"

"Well," said his companion, "they seem to fall for that stuff, but I didn't think a girl as full of pep as Clare, would do so. Here she comes now."

They went out together, Clare and Cornie climbing into the new Mercer, while the others went to call for their respective partners.

Skillfully threading his way through the heavy traffic, Cornie soon was speeding along the Merrick Road. As they left the crowded city behind them Clare unconsciously began to feel that the silent man beside her, all attention to the mechanism of his new car, might in reality be his brother Jean. She recalled the many rides that she and the latter had taken, each silently immersed in thought too deep for expression, even to the other. Suddenly, as they slowed down in passing through Jamaica, Cornie broke the silence. "Some car, eh? I let her out on that last smooth stretch to seventy miles; bet you didn't think it was over forty."

Clare simply nodded her head, but thought, "That is the

difference between them. This one does not see the green grass, the tall stately trees, the sky or clouds, only speed, speed! He wants to rush like this through life."

"We will make it in forty minutes at this rate," he exclaimed excitedly.

Clare loved speed; to drive fast, fly high, and dive deep; but she never forgot the beauty of her surroundings or lost interest in her companions. To-night, this rushing seemed frivolous and foolish. She almost longed for Jean to whisper the beauties of the universe to her.

Finally the car shot up to the "Nassau," and they entered the lobby to find that they had preceded the others of their party.

"We are going to 'Castles-by-the-Sea' to dance," Cornie said, "but let's stroll along the ocean before we go there; we have loads of time."

"I simply adore the ocean," asserted Clare, "it seems so—so everlasting human. Did you ever notice, Cornie, it always looks the same, one wave after the other, just as we always retain our same outward features. Still at times it is tempestuous, the waves roar, reach heights which seem impossible, and then sink down again to calmness and smoothness. We too, have our moods, our stormy times—our moments of grandeur and of despondency—of calmness and quietude."

"You talk like Jean," was the curt response, "I can't see anything but water, mighty fine to go bathing in, and sailing and motor-boating when it's smooth, and dandy to fish in, but a hell of a place when it's rough. I'm strong for wet stuff, but give me Mr. Dryland every time. I get sea-sick without much hesitation."

"You old materialist!" Clare dubbed him laughingly. "You are incurable. Surely, you must enjoy the ocean's salty fragrance," as she breathed deeply.

"Well, this mushy stuff of my brother's makes me sick.

I love beauty—in women—yes—and in men too. I love statuary and pictures of human beings. To me, there is nothing higher, more beautiful than the human form. But I can't see anything in pictures of houses or flowers or whatnot, and I can't rave about my soul—when I don't know whether I have one or not."

"Oh, the human form is lovely, adorable, of course, but you surely must see the beauty of the rose and the balancings of the clouds and all the wonders of nature," she returned seriously.

"I take those things for granted. We do not make a fuss about our breathing, our smelling and other senses, why only of everything we see? We have the perfect form of nature in a beautiful woman. Why bother about anything else?"

"But women are not all there is in the world," the girl suggested. "And there is a beauty in feeling too—for instance—in the enjoyment of good music."

"I only like jazz," the man retorted. "The female form is the perfection and end of the sunshine and the flowers, the water and the air. All helped to make woman what she is to-day—the highest expression of nature—with a perfect form and a beautiful face—what more can one ask? Clare, you are to me that final word," he finished wistfully.

"Flatterer! You know I am too thin to be a 'perfect 36' and we would better be getting on to the 'Castles' or the rest of the crowd will wonder what has become of us. They surely have gone there by now."

"Not before I ask you to be my wife! Clare, you know I adore you!" he avowed, grasping her arm impulsively.

"Oh Cornie, that is just it, you adore me—you say! You worship every fair looking girl, but that isn't love! No, Cornie, please don't ask me to answer you now, and do let my arm go, you hurt!"

"You must realize that to me, adoration is love. I can

give you everything—not only now, but you know Dad is pretty old and there are only Jean and I to share his millions. Let me make you the best dressed girl in America! You don't know what unique ideas I have in girls' clothes—you ought to see what I have designed—and jewels! Say, I would be Tiffany's best customer for you!" He held out an alluring bait. "Why not say yes? Do say yes! You will be sorry if you don't." His voice as he finished sounded like the whine of a wolf, hungry for its prey.

"Not now, I couldn't—maybe some day. Something seems to tell me, intuition or foreboding I believe it is called, that I will say 'yes' sometime, but not now," Clare answered thoughtfully.

"You called my crowd Heart-Mates, because we are always seeking to find the perfect girl. Why not be my Heart-Mate?" He feverishly continued his urging, not sensing her indifference to his pleadings.

"I called them Heart-Mates because they seek only the perfect body; so your heart seeks a mate for your passions, not your soul!" she retorted sharply.

The effect of her words was electrical in the swiftness of the reply they brought. "I suppose you want a Soul-Mate like Jean; that is why you called his bunch Soul-Mates," he sneered.

"Don't be nasty, Cornie, I do like Jean, and I like you too. Jean really seeks a Soul-Mate, his whole life is beautiful. What I want—my soul desire—is to find a real mate, a Heart and Soul-Mate, mind and matter; do you understand? A man who is not one-sided but all-sided—not perfect but human and natural. Come, we are a long way from the 'Castles,' almost down to the 'Brighton.' We must hurry or they will think your wonderful new car trailed behind their old busses." Clare spoke lightly to relieve the tension.

"You may pay dearly for your soul desire!" Cornie

warned her solemnly; but the girl only shrugged her shoulders, as if to say she did not count the risk.

As they proceeded rapidly along the cement walk they were being discussed by their waiting friends. "Clare is certainly one fine girl," remarked Jim Vanduyne. "She is what I call the typical up-to-date, modern American girl. Her folks are no end rich, but she isn't the least bit snobbish. Her college course seemed to broaden her and still let her retain her sweet feminine character, instead of stamping her an over-educated high-brow."

"Listen to the oration," laughingly shouted Attilie Freer, always called Tillie by her intimate friends. "Someone has said, 'American men love to hear themselves express their own opinions better than anything else.' There is the horrid example!"

"I wouldn't complain if he'd say such fine things about me, behind my back, I'll tell the world," observed little Meta Murray.

"You know all men love little girls," Eddie teased her, "and we are no exception."

This dainty whisp of femininity was attired in an orchid colored organdy frock with hat to match. Her complexion was also the same shade; this effect being caused either from the reflection of her costume or some touch added to nature.

"No shrinking violet, but an expensive orchid, that little lady is," Jim commented.

"Well what about us?" asked Tillie, as she looked toward Hortense Leaman, usually called Horto. "Are we two nebs not worthy of the gossip of your lordships?"

"Why you Titian-haired beauty—you symphony in blue!" exploded Jim, as he looked at Tillie. Then as he turned to Horto, "And you baby doll with the big rolling eyes, the lady in black, what could we say about you, that has not already been said a million times? Our hats are off to the

best examples of the genus American flapper now extant," he continued. "Who does not appreciate the confidant carriage, the daring clothes, the elaborate make-up, and realize that you have added to the beauty, as well as the gayety, of the world? Look at the pictures of our mothers, God bless them, in their girlhood days. Can you conceive of yourselves in cotton stockings, skirts dragging along the ground, hair in tight little knots or big pompadors—and shiny noses and white faces?"

"They surely were prim and proper," supplemented Meta, "and it wasn't so very long ago either. Think how hard it must have been for the poor girl with dull, mouse-colored hair and sallow complexion. She and her friends, had to live with them all their lives; now one can suit her own taste."

"The male contingent of this party admit that they are the best bunch of pickers in little old New York," announced the glib-tongued Eddie. "And I'll say that's going some!"

"Sure," added Jim, "you should be highly complimented that you are here with us."

"Listen to the conceited fops," Horto labeled them. "Look at Cornie coming in with Clare! Talk about Beauty and the Beast—I suppose she should be tickled to death to walk with that ugly duckling! I don't care if he is your friend—he is ugly! Look at him, big features, broad nose, shaggy eyebrows with little eyes, like jet beads sunk way in—wrinkled forehead, short and—no, he isn't fat, but stocky. And his hair like two horns, the way he parts the bushy black waves in the center."

"Gee whiz, he sure must have snubbed the black-eyed beauty, all righto!" declared Jim. "I'll admit Cornie isn't a Greek god like his brother, but the chap has his good points—a wonderful personality is not the least of them—he always radiates optimism and good fellowship."

"I detest handsome men," Meta came to Cornie's defense.

"I think a rugged, homely man is more masculine. I agree with you, Jim, there is something different about him—he draws you to him—makes you like him and holds you, too."

"Fight it out," Eddie advised; and then as the couple came closer, he hailed them: "Hello Cornie! Hello Clare! Say Cornie, what have you been doing to the Leaman woman? She has been singing your praises somethin' awful—until the Clay girl came to your rescue."

"Hello, people!" was Clare's greeting, as Cornie gave them each a robust handshake and smirkingly showed his gratification that he had been the topic of their conversation. "I suppose we have been properly dissected by our friends, but here we are, still whole. We had a dandy walk and in what time do you think we covered the trip?"

"Oh, I suppose fifty seconds," Jim bantered.

"No, we didn't use the airship this time, boys," replied Cornie, "but we did make it in forty minutes—which is going some, I'll say."

"It's almost nine-thirty," Eddie told them. "If we are going to carry out our plan to hold a meeting of the Heart-Mates on the beach, we better start dancing and get that part through. Let's go," as he lifted little Meta Clay from her chair and swung her off into a fox-trot to the tune of the latest dance-compelling "Blues."

"Some jazz!" Cornie praised the exuberant music as he teetered to and fro with Clare closely pressed to him. He waved to the 'cellist, sawing wildly and lifting himself from his chair in a regular and furious rhythm like a nervous girl in a riding school. Clare smiled at the blonde cornetist as he hung an old hat over the bell of his shining instrument and brought forth a weird blast.

"You sure are some stepper," Clare told Cornie as he took a flying dip when the clarinet outsquealed the rest of the band.

"Some gang," Jim shouted to Cornie above the furious

drum-beats as they drew their partners into a little air pocket in the crowded floor. "Say, don't forget our date to-morrow at the 'Studio,'" he added.

"The Studio?" Clare questioned.

"Didn't you know I mold the clay now and then? You must come down to the Village and see it," Cornie answered.

"A Greenwich Village sculptor, eh? Since when the practical application of your artistic temperament? I'll bet there is a kick in it somewhere. Let's see, is it a model? or maybe you needed a headquarters in the 'District'?"

"Perhaps both!" he replied.

## CHAPTER II

AN HOUR later they gathered in a circle on the beach to hold their meeting. Waiters from the "Castles" brought ginger-ale. Pocket-flasks quickly appeared to add the touch that makes all the world akin: eight cigarettes were soon giving forth their fragrance, and the "brisk bunch of the younger set" as they were designated by their fellow-members of New York's so-called "Four Hundred," were prepared for business.

"Before I can call this session to order," announced Cornie, "I must ask the non-members to retire."

"Oh, I say," called out Eddie, "why can't the other girls stay? I know Clare is the only *ex-officio* member, because she originated the club, but the other girls ought to be in it, too."

"Of course," agreed Cornie, "I only wanted someone to suggest it. Meta Clay, Tillie Freer, and Horto Leaman, you are all members of the Heart-Mates. Boys, present arms!"

Immediately, four pairs of arms circled four slender waists.

"I don't like this a bit," objected Meta. "I really do not enjoy being pawed over by you, Eddie."

"You ought to be used to it by now. If I kept my distance, believe me, you would resent it very quickly."

"I am no iceberg, Eddie," rejoined Meta, "but I wouldn't cry if *you* never came near me. I don't want to be rare, like jade—but neither do I wish to be common, like stone."

"Listen to the words of wisdom," Jim mocked her. "Those are big words from such a little lady."

"Well, I don't care, a girl has to be careful," Tillie plunged

into the discussion. "Once she lets a man take an inch, he wants a yard."

"I agree with you," Meta said; "we must scatter the ashes before we start to slip."

"Her sex should be her protection among gentlemen," Clare thrust out with dignity.

"To the contrary," Cornie parried, "when a woman is beautiful and fascinating, her sex is a challenge and not a defense."

Clare puckered her finely chiseled lips and brought a scowl to her clear brow. "I don't like that at all, at all," she declared with feeling.

"Well it's the truth," he persisted; "and now I must use the official seal to open the meeting." Unexpectedly he drew Clare to him and pressed a kiss on her lips, still puckered in protest.

"Now, Cornie, I ask you, is that nice?" Clare complained crossly as she pulled away.

"Clare's an old-fashioned prude!" Meta dubbed her.

"I am, am I? I'll show you. Clay Murray, come here this very minute!"

The man called responded with alacrity, and when he stood in front of her, Clare demanded: "Kiss me, my fool!" pursing her lips in readiness. Clay met them full with his and so they remained as the rest cried: "Hold it! Hold it! Mm! Oh! Ah! Booh!"

"Jealous cats!" Clay shouted as he returned to his place.

"You see, I bestow *my* lips on whom I choose, I don't like thieves," Clare told them proudly.

"All men are thieves when the opportunity is presented to steal kisses from beautiful women," Cornie retorted. "But that is the very question we are to discuss! 'What influence do beautiful women have on men's lives and what effect do males have on gorgeous females?' With this as the topic

of the evening, I call to order the meeting of the Heart-Mates," was Cornie's final answer to her protest.

The beautiful September moon looked down with a smile on these votaries of Beauty and Passion, and seemed to beckon them to tread the silvery path over the gleaming waters to a Pleasure Globe—a World of Passion! The old Atlantic, too, urged them on by intoning a soft accompaniment to their voices with the continuous rolling of its waves, like soft drum-beats.

Cornie called the meeting to order with a jocular roll-call: "Cornelius M. Wildner, Jr., Chairman, high-priest of the cult of the Beautiful, eldest son of Cornelius M. Wildner, Sr., international banker," and in a falsetto voice answered, "Present."

"James Vanduyne, Chief-assistant seeker of good-looking girls, department store proprietor by inheritance."

"All here and all in," replied the gentleman named.

"Edward Philbrick, second aid in the admiration of female Birds of Paradise, grandson of James Philbrick, pioneer railroad builder."

"I am here, too," he declared.

"Clay Murray, head of the department of love-making, only member in captivity who earns his own living and glories in the fact. He says he does not envy the idle rich, but note, fellow-priests—and what shall I call the girls?—Virgins of the Temple—he is trying hard to amass enough filthy lucre to break into that same despised class!"

"Here and not guilty," affirmed and denied Clay.

"Now for the ladies—Clare Emerson—only daughter of the 'Radio King,' Walter Emerson. She is the most beautiful girl—of her type—please note, girls, I am very diplomatic,—in New York."

"Ready for business," was Clare's rebuke.

"Attilie Freer, lone orphan, rolling in wealth and exponent of the latest shades in hair."

"I refuse to answer," she pouted.

"Hortense Leaman, originator of the baby-stare, and Father Knickerbocker's most dignified young lady, just from finishing school, but not gummed up with haughtiness if she is the daughter of a famous chewing-gum magnate."

"Present," she responded briefly.

"Finally, Meta Murray, sister of Clay, the biggest little girl in the whole country."

"I protest against the unseemly mirth of our chairman," she announced with mock seriousness.

"Now that we are all here, I am going to ask the lady who named the club and brought it into existence, to give her reason for so doing."

"Well," began Clare, "I don't think that I was ever with any of the four gentlemen present, when they passed a beautiful girl without commenting in some such fashion as: 'Look at that girl, Clare, isn't she a corker?—I tell you there is nothing to equal a beautiful young girl!' or: 'There is a queen, I wish I knew who she is!' And then I happened several times to break into a discussion of feminine beauty that these gallants were having, and heard our friend Cornie repeatedly say: 'The only thing that is really beautiful, is the human form in Woman! I love it in its natural state. I admire it in marble and on canvas—naught else matters. It stirs my heart—it makes me a mate to every beautiful girl! Her sole purpose on earth is to satisfy Man's tastes and appetites.' Jim and Eddie are always boasting of their latest female conquests, and asserting that the divine beauty of feminine flesh is life itself to them. Now that is why I say that they are Heart-Mates. They seek the fleshly beauty. Beauty and love are alone things of earth—heart to heart."

"Bravo!" declared Cornie; "better said than I could have put it myself; only I want to add, that the last speaker is the embodiment of all my hopes and passions."

"Now, I really do think perfection of physique is wonderful," broke in Meta, "but physical beauty is so much a thing of chance, and you know 'beauty is only skin deep.'"

"That's deep enough for me, old dear," Eddie cried recklessly. "I could never love a homely girl! The beautiful girl is a combination of the glory of the sunshine and the coloring of the flowers. She is Nature's pet!"

"To me," said Clay, "there is a divine idea in the beauty of Aphrodite. I can remember still when I saw the spectacle, the majesty of that dreamy form."

"Why is it that women are always the main topic of men's conversation?" asked Horto. "They glory in their captures, and I know that the ugliest little shrimp will try to make his fellow-seekers believe he is a heart-breaker."

"The pursuit of Woman is Man's oldest pastime. We don't carry them off on horse-back any more—now it's by auto or airship," explained Cornie.

"I have no objection to being talked about," replied Meta, "but I resent the lack of respect which reflects on every man's mother, sister, and sweetheart. One would really think every woman was waiting for her prince to take her and ready to grant his every wish, while we know that only few women are untrue to themselves and most are as chaste as Diana," she finished as she dabbed her nose with powder.

"Most women like to lead the men to think they are ready to be very naughty, but when the latter start to overstep the line they draw back," added Tillie with a sophisticated grimace.

"Yes," Clare observed, "they think their desire is like that of the moth for the star, but too often they end up by letting it become the fatal desire of the moth for the candle flame!"

"The deliciousness of love and the restfulness of beauty," contributed Clay, "should not be spoiled by the occasional lapse."

"You mean the capacity to enjoy should not be troubled

by Man's soul," Clare intensified his expression as she looked at Clay.

"We men are natural animals; how can we be calm in the presence of beauty?" was his confession.

"You deny the very beauty of the thing you admire, when you refuse to recognize the spirit within; no woman can be really beautiful who has not a spiritual calm behind the outward mask, however wonderful the latter may be," she maintained with feeling.

"What about the gorgeous demi-mondes?" inquired Clay.

"Even common women have souls. You remember the religious fervor of Arnold's 'Pretty Lady'! And then, early training sometimes leaves an impress that never vanishes; but usually, real beauty does not last long with that type," answered Clare with surprising insight.

"I can't love Beauty in the abstract," persisted Cornie; "I suppose I do carry my ideas to an extreme—just as my brother Jean sees no beauty in anything but the spirit and the soul. I do not believe there is any intelligence in love, it is instinct. My love of beauty in human form is naturally attracted to every beautiful girl, but I can only once meet my mate."

"You have an excess of materialism," replied Clare. "Jean has an over-abundance of spirituality, neither are normal. All excess as well as all renunciation brings its own punishment, the loss of the good in the opposite, for if we look upward or downward always we lose heaven or earth. You, Cornie, worship physical beauty too much, you cannot see the beauty in the wonderful landscape. Jean acknowledges naught but the soul's influence, he loses the human touch of the world. But we can none of us reject the battle—we cannot be spectators. Materialism against Spirituality, is the battle array! Passion versus Renunciation. Perhaps Moderation is the peace term—perhaps there can be no peace—each true to itself."

"You are trying to be a spectator, apparently," Meta jibed. "You are in both camps—Heart-Mates and Soul-Mates."

"That is because I am still in No-Man's Land. Some day I will decide which army I will join. I am a sort of Red Cross nurse, trying to aid both—and not get shot myself."

"Well, here's to Oscar Wilde," cried Eddie, "the founder of the Heart-Mates' creed!" He drained the last of his high-ball. "I am going for a shaker of cocktails I've in my car," he said as he jumped up.

"Here's to King Solomon! He beat old Oscar to it," Clay proposed, when Eddie's treat had been distributed. "I envy him the great concourse of beauties he possessed."

"We are not wiser than the ages gone by," said Tillie. "Men have changed very little in the inwardness of their attitude toward women, since the days of Moses. The injunction 'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife!' has not been greatly improved upon, except that we do recognize now, that the wife has something to say about it."

"It is the nature of grass to bend if the wind blows strong enough; so a woman will respond to the will of man, if his passion is a perfect hurricane," added Cornie with a positive assurance that annoyed Meta.

"Not all women!" she objected strenuously.

"No, there are spiritual women, like soul-loving men, but most women do not fall because they are not tempted; either they lack the earthly beauty that we have been discussing, or chance has not thrown a designing male in their path," was Cornie's bold reply.

"Then you believe in the 'fall of man' and woman too—in the natural badness of women," suggested Clare audaciously.

"No, I maintain that all women are innately good at heart—but I also know that they are frail and weak when tempted."

"And man is not?" she asked cynically.

"He certainly is not the stronger, when his passion rules him."

"Well, when it does?" Clare continued to probe.

"A girl will give in to the wild impulse of the moment that he thus creates and overcome her sound desire to do right. Later, a vain regret succeeds the transient joy, and finally a disgust with herself. It is all so human," Cornie's words showed his knowledge of feminine nature.

"And the man?" persisted Clare, "You must have been the confidant of girlish frailties; I wonder if you understand your own sex as well."

"To the man, all loves—all passionate desires, but the real one are but passing whims. To the girl, each adventure is the last, in her own mind," he completed his grilling research.

Tillie attracted their attention by throwing away her cigarette and producing a tiny silver pipe. "A light please, Eddie," she demanded. As he complied, he sang out: "When Til-lie hits her old pipe, tra, la, la."

"Our emotions have their heights and their depths like the hills and the valleys," Horto renewed the discussion.

"And occasionally a glacier of over-powering desire sweeps both and carries all before it," Jim gave as his viewpoint.

"I contend," Clare resumed presently, "that when Woman breaks the moral law, she does so most often from ignorance or in the blindness of a real love and with unbounded confidence in her lover, rather than from a positive desire to do wrong."

"That is the usual excuse," Cornie retorted with worldly wisdom; "Woman never sins—just slips." He took up a handful of sand and let it slide through his fingers as if illustrating his thought. "Even the woman of the underworld will tell you that she was led to her ruin."

"And I believe her!" Clare answered belligerently. "The

first step is never deliberate. No one would knowingly choose such a life. She either is led or pushed down by some unthinking man; tries to climb back but finding the effort too hard, is finally content to wallow in the mud."

"But why is it," Cornie inquired, "that even the married woman must still seek the admiration of other men to satisfy her?" Proceeding to answer himself, he said: "Because man-made monogamy is as irksome at times to her as to her husband."

"Is polygamy your ideal then, along with physical beauty?" asked Horto in surprise.

"Absolutely no!" Cornie denied, "I merely say that in Man's and Woman's nature, there is most certainly a polygamous instinct which, in the Woman, married or unmarried, requires the adulation of more than one male; and in the Man, the actual companionship of more than one woman or the vicarious enjoyment of them, through book, play, or opera, or the discussion of imaginary affairs when in the company of other men. That is your explanation of man's apparent disrespect."

"Woman wants Man to desire her," he continued. "She seeks always to make herself beautiful, to attract him. Many a middle-aged woman is a kind, motherly person, once she forgets her aspiration to be considered a beautiful young girl."

"But they say love is blind," retaliated Tillie. "History tells us that Queen Elizabeth had a red nose. I wonder if Sir Walter Raleigh saw it?"

"Love is never blind, but always alive to the minutest spot which mars its object," he answered.

"I see," said Horto, "you want perfection—just as the child cries to possess an elephant he sees in the passing parade."

"The child has the pleasure of hoping to have his longing fulfilled; so has man, who hopes to find the perfect woman, the joy of his yearning."

"But there is no perfect woman!" declared Clare rather sarcastically.

Clay supplemented his statement: "I mean perfect in physical beauty, form, color, and features."

"Earthly—dust to dust—again. I incline now to the other camp," Clare fumed.

"You'll admit, at any rate, that the American man has placed Woman on a higher pedestal than men of other nationality ever have done," declared Clay proudly.

"His own family, yes! But as to other women, they are proper game to chase," came back Meta; "still there is this one satisfaction; you may hook the fish, though deep in the water; you can shoot the birds, though high in the air; and you may catch a girl's body—but her soul is out of your reach!"

"If a man's passion is big enough, she will respond, body and soul," Cornie insisted.

"Don't frighten the girls," pleaded Eddie, "or they will fear to let their Eddie kiss them."

"Your amorous breath is like garlic, it would drive any girl to drink before she would accept your embraces," laughingly proclaimed Clay.

"Speaking of garlic," said Clare, "I read the other day of an old European custom, among unmarried girls, of putting onions on an altar on Christmas Eve and holding a mirror over them to see in it the number of husbands they will have and who shall be the first; so love is strong."

"That is the love that brings tears," remarked Tillie.

"If Man's love for Woman was as pure as hers is for him, she would shed less tears for his inconstancy," Meta complained.

"What would you have, Meta," asked her brother, "Man to place Woman under a glass case, like the old porcelains of our grandmothers?"

"That is just where he wants his particular woman to stay,

until he is ready to remove her to his own cage. Whether she be wife or mistress, the man insists that he be the only male in his woman's life. She is taboo—but all others are an open field with no closed season."

"A single standard, is that what you want?"

"No, only that every woman be treated with the same respect by all as by her own family, and not be the handball of Man's game, her reputation knocked to and fro, in a world of slipshod, unchivalrous commonness!"

"Listen to the family squabble, when brother and sister can't agree, how can the rest of us?" wearily decided Horto.

"Come on, let's start back," Eddie ordered, "we haven't all got Mercers."

They arose, brushed off the sand and went into the hall to get their wraps. Then they separated as they had come, to return to the city.

As they speeded away from the beach Cornie said wistfully to Clare, "I am not a celestial lover, but very human."

"You are somewhat of a cynic; you are too earthly in your love. You feel only through your senses and you really have not a very high ideal of Woman. To you she is a mere Jack O'Lantern, to amuse whoever may chance to be struck with her brilliance. You have too keen a sense of physical life and too great a lack of spiritual."

"Do you know what it means for a man to be in love? His own body is no longer free—his life radiates from another center. When one is fancy free, all his life is within himself, he is the architect of his own actions. But when in love, it is another's will that dominates his happiness. All certainty is destroyed—nothing is positive—doubt continually assails him. Such is my sad condition now!"

"Too bad about you," she satirized.

"I want you, Clare, in this world as you are to-day, beautiful and charming. I want to enjoy life with you," he went on, ignoring her caustic comment.

"You want me to remain forever beautiful—life to be a perfect June day—always day and never night. No one's life can be like that! I wish I could see your way, Cornie. I think life would be very pleasant with you." The girl suddenly had grown very serious. "Your lure of ease, comfort, and joy—sunshine only—calls me. But I am afraid of the clouds; adversity you do not recognize now; when that comes, the soul must be your only anchor. Some day, I will give you your answer, dear, not now."

They drove to the Hotel Modore and as Cornie helped Clare out of the car the latter said, "We are going back to Buttermilk Bay to-morrow. Mother and I have finished our shopping. We shall stay in Massachusetts until we leave for the South, not going to open our town house. Come up to 'World's End' sometime—but beware! we always keep our guests, because the name of our place tells them they can't go farther. Make it soon, will you?"

"Delighted! I'll come. I'd go anywhere to see you!" responded Cornie heartily; and after escorting Clare to the elevator he left the hotel, whistling. Somehow he felt that sooner or later she would be his wife, and the feeling gave him infinite satisfaction. He could not believe that anyone could withstand his love-making. Her hesitation merely urged him to greater effort to win her.

Clare gave her mother a kiss, as she was preparing to retire, and said wistfully, "Mother, is beauty everything, or does one's soul count for more?"

"Beauty with wealth, can have the world at her feet, that is positive. One's soul is a very uncertain thing," replied the worldly Mrs. Emerson.

"But satisfaction of the latter is more desirable than worldly success—isn't that what you have taught me?" queried the daughter.

"As a child, my dear; as a woman, you must not let yourself drift into too deep water. The soul is very well for

Sunday and church, but for everyday, look to your complexion and your hair, my dear. Do not forget that while your father has plenty, it would be very satisfactory to marry a wealthy man who could give you everything that you are accustomed to having. Now Cornelius is a good substantial man and will never let his money get away from him when he receives it from his father. Jean will probably divide his share with every tramp he meets on the road, and let his wife live on love, while he talks of soul desires. The world needs dreamers, my sweetheart, but they are not so comfortable to live with as materialists."

"But mother, you said you would go with me up to Jean's place in the Catskills for this week-end. You need a change."

"Rest is all we'll get there, but I will take you. It ought to do you good to talk with Jean. He is so safe—and his friends—he always has such odd people—will help to broaden you. But be careful not to fall in love with Jean! He certainly does look like a Greek god, but he is so irresponsible and whimsical. I never can understand what he is talking about. But go to sleep, it's too late now for you to get your full beauty sleep."

Mrs. Emerson was doing her best to mold her daughter into a dutiful subject of King Passion.

PART II  
THE UNIVERSE OF BUSINESS



## CHAPTER III

A TAXI drew up in front of the Universal Radio Corporation Building on upper Broadway; the occupant paid the chauffeur, then leisurely stepped out, sauntered up to the windows of the magnificent show room at the right of the entrance, looked with interest at the various styles of radio sets, small and large, at the varied equipment, then without hurrying entered the lobby.

The man was short and fat, but upright and solid as a rock. He had two distinguishing features, a deep curve in his very straight back, and a florid fat face with cheeks canopied with bushy, silvery gray hair, carefully parted in the middle and brushed back smoothly from his high forehead.

Leaving the elevator at the top floor he crossed the hall to a door on which appeared the word "Private," opened it and entered a very large room. About a third of the way back was a railing behind which sat a girl, a sign bearing the word "Information" in front of her. Numerous closed doors bordered the three sides of the room, about which several tables and chairs were scattered.

"Good morning, Miss Hayes," the newcomer smilingly greeted the girl.

"Good morning, Mr. Glynn. I will tell Mr. Murphy you are here." She held back the gate for him to enter the larger space, then inserted some plugs in the switchboard in front of her. "Mr Glynn is here, Mr. Murphy!" she announced; and then, after a moment, "Very well, I'll tell him."

"You can go right in." She motioned toward a door at the extreme right corner.

Glynn proceeded across the heavily carpeted room and opened a door which bore the name, "L. N. Murphy." As he entered, a slender, sharp featured young man with very black hair and a tiny mustache arose, extended his hand and said, "Mr. Emerson is alone." He opened the door to an inner office, entrance to which could be gained only through the one in which they were.

The two stood quietly for a moment as the man at the enormous flat top desk continued to keep his head bowed over the papers before him, apparently unaware of their presence.

Murphy pointed to a chair and Glynn seated himself. The former advanced to the desk and the man behind looked up. "Mr. Glynn, sir," Murphy announced.

"Oh, good morning, Glynn, I am glad to see you," said the man at the desk as if he had just discovered him. His voice was high-pitched and weak, in curious contrast to his appearance.

"Morning, Walter," the visitor answered.

With a single motion, Emerson dismissed his secretary and called Glynn closer to the desk. Sitting there he gave the impression of a tall, big man. His head was thick and broad, his face full, with ruddy cheeks and a rather prominent nose. A heavy crop of russet brown hair loosely combed made his forehead scarcely noticeable. His shoulders were wide, he was big boned, but as he arose and walked slowly to the window the sense of bigness disappeared. He seemed all head and shoulders—his trunk just stocky enough to support the upper part of his body but his legs too short to give proper proportion to the whole.

With the brilliant eyes of an enthusiast he peered out of the window over the hodge-podge of New York's upper

business district. He always had a preoccupied air as if his mind were ever busy with its problems.

"I am sixty years old, Glynn—sixty years," Emerson exclaimed suddenly. He threw off the figure as if it hurt him.

"You have me beaten by a few, not many though," said his visitor.

"I should be set for life—should be set for life." Emerson had a habit of repeating phrases which he considered important.

"What?" Glynn retorted, "you not fixed for life? You—the head of the newest and greatest of all modern business combinations—president of the Universal Radio Corporation!"

"Yes—yes—I suppose you think so—but Glynn, you are my broker, you ought to know better. You know I only hold a little better than fifty-one per cent of the stock."

"Enough to control!"

"Just enough. And that damn Wildner is hanging on to the twenty-five per cent he grabbed when we bought that last group of battery factories; waiting like a wolf for me to need him again! He wants the Universal for his damn sons—the old hound!"

The stock-broker remained silent. He knew he had not been sent for to hear the old complaint, but for some definite purpose.

"I've got to get enough of the outstanding stock to give me some leeway to play around in the Market a bit now and then. I have to be afraid now to let any of my stock to for fear of being caught in a jam if I should have to exercise my control. I've got a big job for you, old man, I want to increase my holdings at least ten to fifteen per cent. I am going the limit to get it! And we might land some of Wildner's if we put the price up high enough." He smote his hands in his excitement. "He'll never get it back if we

do! If I could only shoot my holdings up to seventy or seventy-five per cent; then I'd breathe easier; feel free of Wildner and make a killing on the Street once in a while."

"Out for big game, eh?" Glynn finally ventured.

"What's the last quotation on Universal?" Emerson ignored the comment.

"It closed at fifty-two."

"Fifty-two? Here's my calculation. The total issue is fifteen million shares. I have close to eight million. Wildner has three million seven fifty. The remainder is scattered. The Public is not selling, the market is stagnant."

"You will sell and bring it down?"

"No. I'll buy and force it up—up—up so high we'll get them coming."

"But the money?"

"You know what I have to start with and I'll pyramid—pyramid—pyramid—buy and and put up what I get."

"Do you realize how much your eight million shares are worth right now?"

"You think I am a damn fool, eh?"

"I suppose we are never satisfied, never can let well enough alone."

"It is up to you to put it across, but don't hog it. Spread the job out—parcel it to as big a bunch of brokers as you can. We must cover up the appearance of a single effort. Throw dust in Wildner's eyes as well as the dear Public."

"You are going to bull the market—force Universal Radio sky high, eh?"

"Buy and buy until we've got what we are going after! You know the old game, they fall for the high prices."

"But is it worth what you will pay for it?"

"My dear Glynn, you have been my broker for years; you know, when I buy, I know what's back of the stock. Universal has millions of unfilled orders—the future is cer-

tain. I am simply mortgaging its future to hold it absolutely in my hands."

"You are the only man who can develop the great future of the Radio," said the broker.

"It can't get away from me, the Universal controls all the basic patents." Emerson paced up and down the room as he excitedly outlined his plans. He seemed to gather new energy as he went on.

The telephone buzzer rang. Emerson looked at it with a scowl of annoyance but finally took up the receiver. "Well?" he questioned—then paused. "What the hell does he want?"—another pause. "Tell him I'll see him at two this afternoon." He hung up the receiver and turned to Glynn. "Old man Wildner wants to see me. I suppose he will politely—he's always too damn polite—suggest certain changes in our company. He loves to pound it in."

The buzzer rang again. "Well, what now? What?" he roared, "the impudence! Very well—show him in when he arrives." He put up the receiver with a bang. "He's got a hell of a lot of nerve, said he had to see me this morning and would be right over."

Glynn smiled. "You don't like to take orders."

"Twenty-five per cent! You'd think he controlled Universal, instead of me. Well I'll be ready for him."

"I'll trot along and get busy—you don't want me to wait until after you see Wildner?"

"No!" he thundered. "Start the fireworks right off. Keep me advised. Shoot her up, Glynn," and he turned to his desk before his visitor had left the room.

## CHAPTER IV

As GLYNN left the building he passed a most distinguished appearing man entering it, whom he recognized as Cornelius M. Wildner, Sr., head of the world-wide known banking firm of Cornelius M. Wildner & Co., and present head of the old and aristocratic Wildner family. He was the fifth of the same name, and looked the part; of medium height, he was neither stout nor thin, but exceedingly well proportioned. His face was thin, almost ascetic looking. He had a little white hair, evenly parted on each side, closely cut, and a van-dyke beard, trimmed like an English hedge. His eyes were black and very small, with eye-brows still black, which gave him the look of always peering at something. His nose was straight, his jaw narrow and firm. He was very pale and was perfectly groomed.

He made his way, as Glynn had done, to Emerson's office; "Pardon the intrusion," he said, taking away the bluntness of Emerson's, "I thank you for arranging your own appointment," which he threw at Wildner. "I have no doubt you are curious as to my mission," the visitor half questioned.

Emerson puckered his lips and raised his brows, then shrugged his shoulders to express his indifference; but his eyes plainly showed that Wildner had sensed his feelings.

"Your daughter?" Wildner adjusted his pince-nez as he looked at the picture in a swinging frame on the desk.

Emerson nodded.

"She is really the cause of my visit," Wildner explained.

"Clare, the cause?"

"Yes. You know I have no daughter, so I am interested in yours. You have no sons, I presume your interest in my two boys."

Emerson made no response. In fact he had no idea what the other was getting at.

"You work too hard, Emerson. You ought to play more," Wildner went on easily.

"I don't know how to play. I've never had time. I work till late and then I sleep. I am very regular in my life. The Universal is my life! It may sound trite, but I enjoy my work more than anything else I can do."

"I know how you feel. In a different way, I suppose I am like you. I am a golf enthusiast, you know, but I work too hard at it. I determined when I took it up that I was going to play a good game or not at all. I do not have to be ashamed of my game now, if I do so say. You play, don't you?"

"After a fashion. Somehow I can't put my mind on it."

"It's worth while—anything's worth while that takes your mind off of your business."

"But it doesn't with me, that's the trouble."

"Keep at it—it'll come in time."

Suddenly a wave of resentment surged over Emerson. Why was he listening to advice as if he were a school-boy to be taught by this dominating man?

"I did the same thing with paintings," Wildner continued, ignoring the growing irritation produced by his words and manner. "I always was interested in them, but I knew I couldn't cover the whole field, so determined to specialize in the work of artists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. I have quite a gallery. You must see it."

"I don't know one painting from the other." Emerson wondered why he should admit this even as he said the words.

"You and I can't help but go at things strenuously. It's in the blood of our generation. We don't work for money, we don't play for fun, we labor and play hard to give vent to our energy—it's the constructive urge."

Emerson understood now. This man was like himself after all. "You are right. What I crave is power—power over men—power to create—to do things—things worth while. I am no fine phrase maker, but what I mean—" he arose and spoke intensely, in brief phrases, "is that I am working for my children, not for myself." He looked at the picture on the desk as if it were an idol. "Sometimes when I think of the thousands and thousands of men and women working for me all over the world, I feel like an old slave-driver—and then again like their father. They are my children, too. I've got to keep things going for them as well as for my own girl."

"Feel that way at times myself; but of course, in the banking game, one is more detached, there isn't the personal touch with the worker; but we furnish the money that keeps the world going 'round."

This drew Emerson back to earth. "You said my daughter was the cause of your coming here?" he questioned.

"Yes," the elder man hesitated. "It's rather a delicate subject. I want a daughter, Emerson, and I have no doubt you would like a son."

"Well?"

"My son Cornie, loves your daughter. Couldn't we each nudge our own a little?"

It was clear to Emerson, now. Wildner was seeking to steal his business for the son. He turned fiercely: "My daughter will marry a man—not a dissipated idler!" he exclaimed.

The man addressed seemed to grow even more pale than he had been, but retained control of himself. "I have another son, a saint, if you prefer," he said quietly, with a half-sneer.

"We don't want a sentimental mollycoddle—a fool—either and it's not enough merely to be your son, or the grandson, or even great-grandson of one of your illustrious name."

"Those of my line are gentlemen, sir!"

"You are heirs—I'm an ancestor! I am founding my line—and my daughter must help. She'll marry a real human, one who can pass the acid test of dyed-in-the-wool Americanism!"

"You accuse my sons of not being Americans? Why, a Wildner came over on the Mayflower—and you dare to refuse a union of our families!" Wildner laughed.

"I do! Your blue-blood will never mix with my red-blood! Americanism is a thing of action, not of birth!"

"You would emulate Napoleon, in giving new blood and new energy to America, as he did to France. But they called him an upstart."

"Yes, that's what they called Napoleon, I believe. I don't know much history, but——"

"Napoleon met his Waterloo. The Bourbons came back."

"The beginning of his end came when he married that aristocrat, Marie Louise. That's one hobby I've had—Napoleon." He pointed to a bronze bust of the Little Corporal. "I've bought every book——"

Wildner interrupted. He did not care to listen to a dissertation upon that man of destiny. "You have had a rush of gold to your head, Emerson; have you forgotten that I helped to build your business and fortune?"

"And exacted your pound of flesh—as bankers always do!"

The self-contained banker lost control of himself. The natural man under his skin broke out in vituperation: "You'll pay for this—you'll beg on your knees to have your girl marry Cornie! They will be married in spite of your attitude. Not that I give a rap for you or yours—you are barbarians! But what my boy wants—he shall have. Your plan is that your precious heir shall marry your own selection. A political match is your aim. Social position, education, family, culture, mean nothing to you; money you've got now and the only type you admire—that you can understand—is that evolved from some gutter snipe——"

"Who should stay there to work for you and your parasites!" supplemented Emerson.

"You are obsessed with your own importance. You went up like a sky rocket—you'll come down like one!"

"I am lighting things up for a few thousand workingmen while I am up, anyway; and when I hit the ground, you'll hear the impact, all right!"

Wildner took up his hat and cane. "Samson, if you know who he was, was a strong man, but he had a weak spot. Your pocket-book is the only place to hit you. I warn you to guard it carefully."

"Thank you. Undoubtedly it is unusual for you to meet someone who doesn't kow-tow, bow down like a Chinaman, and worship your ancestors and you and your princes as the Sons of Heaven. It must be an unique sensation."

"Really it has been more interesting to study the personality of a king who still thinks he can do no wrong." Wildner had entirely calmed himself by now. "I had no idea there was a rebirth of the old vikings, but it is too amusing. You ought to know the shock your refusal would give the debutantes and their doting parents who have been angling for my boys. Your wife and daughter will give you a pretty time, I am quite sure."

"I am the head of my family. I make all decisions of importance for my wife and daughter."

"I pity them! But I really must be going. I thank you for giving me a chance to show my associates that the old man is not too far gone for a real fight yet. I bid you good morning, sir!"

All Emerson could utter was, "Go to hell!" but Wildner had already strutted out of the office. His rather tired, bored-looking eyes had a renewed light in them and at least ten of his seventy years had lifted from his slightly stooped shoulders as he left the building.

Emerson sat with eyes closed and head on his hand for

several minutes after his visitor had gone. Then he became suddenly alert, pressed his buzzer, and started covering a scratch pad with figures.

"Murphy, we are going to have the fight of our lives—a battle royal!" he announced as his secretary responded to his call. "Get Glynn on the line and tell him to get busy damn quick—every minute counts—tell him to act damn quick! I've got to beat Wildner to it!"

The telephone buzzer rang. The secretary answered: "Murphy talking—Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Emerson—yes—he's here, just a minute." Then to Emerson, "It's your wife."

Taking the receiver the man addressed said: "Yes, Mary, what is it—I am very busy—young Wildner?—To-night? What are you going up there for?" He hesitated. "All right; go ahead. No, I can't make it myself—too busy. Good-bye."

Murphy looked at him inquiringly.

"My wife says Jean Wildner, he's the old man's sky-dreamer, has asked us up to his place in the Catskills for the week-end. He has just installed a high-power radio set. I'd like to go, there are some new ideas I'd try out in the mountain air. Glynn and the dreamer are great pals. He'll probably be going up, and I could talk with him, but I wouldn't give old Wildner the satisfaction to think I'd hob-nob with his son. I'd keep the folks away, but I don't believe in butting in on their social affairs unless they really matter, and this doesn't. Guess I'll go have a bite to eat."

Murphy again took up the receiver: "Mr. Emerson is going to lunch immediately, Miss Hayes."

After the young man had helped his superior with his coat, he stepped to the door and held it open for him; then hurried to open the door of his own office. Like a flash Emerson passed through the large outer office. Miss Hayes was holding the gate open, an office boy the hall door and the

elevator was waiting. As soon as he stepped in, it shot down! The operator opened the gate, the starter was holding the street door open, his chauffeur had the car door ajar, and in less time than it would take the ordinary man to get to the elevator, Emerson was riding away. So do the monarchs of the Business Universe avoid chance encounters with way-laying solicitors and conserve every moment.

PART III  
THE CONTINENT OF SOUL LIFE



## CHAPTER V

GOD CREATED the Catskills, Irving was their discoverer; John Burroughs became intimately acquainted with them; and introduced his friends to the world! Jean's summer vacations from school had most frequently been spent camping amid the wooded valleys; on the bare shoulders, projecting their nakedness from their green gowns, or among the soft waving plumes of the head-dresses of those fully clothed. He finally emerged from college, a disciple of Burroughs and a soldier in Thoreau's army—a militant naturalist and idealist. His practical father built him a comfortable home on High Peak, a miniature mountain, solitary in its loneliness.

“Jean can blow off steam there,” he explained to his friends. “I cannot stand him mooning and dreaming around me. Mary will take care of him. She has been with us since before Jean was born, and understands him better than I do and almost as well as his sainted mother did. Now, I can forget about him—I have Cornie. He is so sensible—spends a couple of hours a day in the office and I can usually find him in his room or at his club between ten and eleven o'clock every morning.”

The wide front porch of “Soul’s Desire,” the name Jean gave to his house, overhangs a deep valley. Often the clouds are beneath it. It stands on the crest of a giant earth wave! A petrified ocean with billow after billow, ravine after ravine, rolling away from it to magnificent distances. Each ridge a hastening comber, curled and ready to break; here a spot of white where a sublime breaker toppled over in a

foaming waterfall; there a single home, a group of buildings, bits of wreckage hesitating for a moment in the stifled swirl of the wave! The great ground swell seems to be sweeping with a breathless rush toward the little island house, so alone. The giant boulders about it seem anxious to drop into the on-coming tumult, the pines, firs and hemlocks stretch forth their arms as if beckoning to those below to hurry; but no nearer does it all come; the green waves never fall, they bend gracefully with the wind, they dance in the path of the sun, a glorious pageant of light and shadow. They do not spend their energy in hopeless breaking of the surf on the beach; this tremendous ocean retains all its power, all its strength, all its beauty, forever!

Here, on a clear September day, Jean in rough outing suit with open collar was seated in serious conversation with a slender, rather emaciated looking young man who had the zealot's sharp featured face and an olive complexion. He might have been a Russian poet, but actually was a rabbi.

"I tell you, Nate," Jean forcibly brought out his views, "the children are not up here long enough at a time—next year we must change our schedule."

"But that would cut down the number we could bring up."

"We will have to increase our facilities. That's the disheartening thing about this fresh air business, no matter how hard one tries he can only scratch the top—there are so many poor air-hungry children."

"But what a satisfaction it must be to you, Jean, to think of the hundreds of East Side kiddies who look on you as a Santa Claus."

"If it wasn't for your aid, Nate, and your understanding of them, the parents of these Jewish children never would let them come up here and my shacks would be tenantless." He laughed at the thought of the present crowded condition of the buildings, the roofs of which could be seen from where they sat.

"It means a lot for me to be up here, too!" the Rabbi could not resist saying.

"I think I'd die without you! Say, do you know I can hardly wait until Clare and her mother arrive, to show off my radio? I feel like a kid myself. Let's see if we can hear anything now."

The house was built with porches on all sides. In the center of the roof a small square tower extended, from which a wide view could be had. In this room, whither they now went, Jean had installed a high power radio set. Both men put the receivers to their ears.

"Nothing but code messages," Jean said disgustedly.

"You can't expect fancy programs all the time!" the Rabbi told him.

They returned to the porch just as an automobile drew alongside the steps and Mrs. Emerson and Clare alighted.

"Welcome! Welcome!" Jean called enthusiastically. "The Radio welcomes you! I know I would never have gotten you up here, if it hadn't been for that."

"No, I'll be frank with you, Jean," Mrs. Emerson returned, "it was the thought of absolute quiet and rest that brought us here."

Clare winked slyly at Jean, who flushed with embarrassment. "I—I want you to meet my good friend Rabbi Felsnik. He's just a beginner at the ministerial game," Jean explained. "You have heard of Rabbi Mentor—Nate's his assistant."

"It must be rather hard to be the assistant to a man as well known as Rabbi Mentor," Clare broke into the conversation.

"It's inspiring—he's really a big man," was the Rabbi's reply.

"I'll go in and unpack our few things," Mrs. Emerson said. Jean rose to show her the way.

"What a heavenly spot!" Clare enthused as she took in the wonderful mountainscape.

"Its bigness quite takes your breath away, doesn't it?" The Rabbi chuckled proudly as if he were the owner of the mountains. "They have given Jean a big soul," he said seriously.

"I have heard a great deal about you from Jean and of the discussions that you, Mr. Glynn, and Jean have up here. I have named you the Soul-Mates!"

"Yes, so Jean told us. I am afraid you have given us too serious a title."

She replied smilingly, "You are serious. In fact just now you have an awfully long face!"

"You will not be offended if I tell you that Beauty always makes me serious, whether it be human or nature's?"

"I didn't know flattery was taught in divinity schools," she laughingly answered, as her mother and Jean returned.

"Would you care to go over and see our kiddies? You know we have a fresh air camp up here," Jean asked.

"Oh, I'd love to!" Clare accepted readily.

"I prefer to rest here," Mrs. Emerson replied.

"You go ahead, Jean, I'll keep Mrs. Emerson company," said the young Rabbi.

"All right! come on, Clare," Jean said as he took the girl's hand and they ran down the steps like children.

It was the sunset hour when the mountains seem flooded with a celestial glow, a wide shimmer of color deepening from violets and purples in the far east through soft greens and blues, browns and grays, yellows and oranges—through innumerable gradations of marvelous tints and shades to the delicate roseate hues and faded carmines surrounding the lurid red ball of fire in the west.

On the porch Mrs. Emerson felt a sense of peace and rest overcome her, and she said to the Rabbi, "Communing with Nature quiets one's nerves."

"Our modern life is too artificial!" he replied.

"Perhaps, but we would grow tired of Nature, if we had too much of her."

"I don't think so. She has so many moods. It seems to me I could never tire of her."

"Well, of course, you are a minister!"

"A sort of special partner, is that your idea?" he asked amusedly.

She smiled. "We do think of ministers as being a little—what shall I say?"

"Queer?"

"No, abnormal or rather, super-normal."

"Either below or above the average, is that it?"

"It depends upon the viewpoint."

As Clare and Jean walked toward the cottages, Jean said: "It is wonderful to have you here, in my mountains."

He turned and looked her in the face, catching there a joyous light.

"I am happy to be here," she replied.

They continued their walk in silence until they reached the cottages. The children were at supper. They greeted Jean with a boisterous, "Hello, Uncle Jean!"

"Hello, kids!" he replied heartily.

Clare and Jean passed around the tables, stopping to pat a curly head or kiss a rosy little cheek.

As they strolled back, arm in arm, Clare said: "It gives you pleasure to do for others, doesn't it?"

"Why, I never think about my work in that way, I simply do what I can." He pointed behind them; "That's what money is for."

They reached the house as the evening shadows were enveloping it.

After dinner they gathered in the tower room, and listened to the broadcasting of a symphony orchestra. When the concert was over, Jean asked Clare, "Would you care to take a walk and see the man in the moon?"

"Oh, I'd love to! You will not mind, Mother and Rabbi Felsnik?"

"Go right ahead. The Rabbi will keep me company," Mrs. Emerson consented.

Jean led Clare down a rocky path to a miniature plateau, a ledge that seemed like a balcony. Together they watched the moon rise over the mountains, with the trailing grays and coppery blues as the beams touched the massive Gibralters and the velvet blackness of the ravines. There was a quiet, a solemn peacefulness in the air. Jean threw himself on the lichen-carpeted rock at full length, while Clare sat on a huge boulder, a picture in her dainty white frock.

"You look like a Druid priestess, the spirit, the soul of these beautiful trees," said Jean as he glanced from the girl to the overhanging branches.

"And you seem to me like an ancient prophet, way up here in these wonderful mountains. It does not seem possible that we should both be actually in the twenties; we seem hundreds of years old!"

"I love to stretch myself and feel the firmness and solidity of the earth," he mused. "It seems to support and strengthen me. Often I lie here like this, and looking out into the unlimited space my soul seems to float away, to be released and commune with all humanity—but I bore you with my vaporings."

"No, no, don't stop. I feel, as I listen to you, well, as if I were in church. You know your voice sounds here like an organ prelude. Please go on—let me hear you think aloud."

"Clare, there are times when for an instant I seem to have attained my soul's desire! I have a feeling of eternal harmony, as if floating through space, as though a part of all creation. Then I feel the ever-lasting rightness of things. It is as if love overpowered me, and made me understand the mystery of life and death. I do not seem to breathe! It is, I imagine, the feeling that one must have

just before passing from this world—a sort of last impression."

"How wonderful! But it is more than human affection, it is greater than love."

"Don't you think that it finds its renewed birth in a deep, pure, abiding love of man for woman, such a love, dear, as I have for you?"

"Why Jean, you have never before told me that you loved me!"

"I have hesitated, because I did not feel that the kind of love I could offer you would be what you would wish." A vision of Clare seated in the Hotel Modore lobby smoking—a thought of her surrounded by flashy admirers—crossed his mind, and he hesitated; then as he saw her as she sat on the rock, a part of nature, of his sincere world, he was encouraged to proceed.

"I am an outdoor man, an unconventional creature. I can not stand the crowds of the City; the houses choke me, the silly talk bores me; I am only free when I am here, far from it all. In the city, I would never have spoken to you of my love, but in this spot, away from the crowd, you seem so like I am, that I could not restrain myself. Could you be happy here with me?"

"I do not know, Jean. I am a curious girl. I think I am happy when I am with my friends in the city; I love the gayety, the parties, yes, the dresses and the gossip—but I love this too, all nature, all humanity."

"And me, you do care for me a little?" he murmured.

"I do," she said gently; "but I care for your brother also, and he too loves me. You are so different from each other—I really believe I love you both!"

"I cannot offer you all the comfort you are used to, because I have only the allowance my father gives me; but of course, some day, I suppose I will get my share of his estate."

"You know I have enough of my own not to bother about that," she interposed, "but really—I wouldn't like to ask your father for everything I would want. I could never live on an allowance, so that settles any immediate answer to your question. Cornie at least makes money himself, he wouldn't ask me to live on an allowance," Clare thought—and voiced her thought—along modern lines.

"You are right, I suppose we must wait," he sighed. "I am not a money-maker. It doesn't seem worth while to me, but I had to tell you how I felt."

"Come, we must go back, or mother will think I have fallen off of your old mountain," she declared. Jean stepped beneath the rock on which she sat and she jumped into his arms. With a little hug he helped her to her feet; then started to put his arms around her, but she gave a little pull and hopped away.

Suddenly she turned back and kissed him, full upon the lips. "I wonder! I wonder!" she murmured—then asked; "What is love?"

"What is love?" he repeated as she swayed in his arms—then answered slowly; "I think it must be that feeling that I am experiencing now; the sensation of one's whole being, melted and transferred from yourself into another's keeping, as if you are no longer your own master, but dependent on the whims and caprices of your beloved."

Their hearts so close together, seemed to be trying to beat in unison. A first great love, nothing can equal it, nothing compare with its astounding revelation! The very being of each seems to be infused into the other; a marvelous upheaval; a great transformation! After being so overwhelmed with emotion, a link is forged that never can be entirely dissolved, even though the paths of the lovers separate; there is always that dim something that has arisen from their love, a separate entity, a soul-flower that is everlasting. True Love is the deep well-spring of human life

whose waters revive constantly, and is a veritable Fountain of Youth; for they who love never grow old; love knows not time, only Eternity. It leads to the soul's release and finally to God.

"I don't see why we should try to stem the tide of our love! Nothing else really matters," Jean burst out.

"Yes, it does," Clare denied. "Lots and lots of things matter—particularly to a girl—and more particularly to me—so let's forget the serious and play while we are here."

"Anything you say," he accepted, as they started back to the house.

## CHAPTER VI

SUNDAY MORNING Clare came out on to the porch just as Jean came up the steps, an empty market basket on each arm. "Good morning, Mr. Early-bird, have you been catching worms?" She motioned to his baskets.

"Good morning," he replied, "No, I haven't been worm hunting!"

"Well, give an account of yourself!" she urged.

"I've been doing my usual Sunday morning tasks. An old couple live in a little cottage over there," he said pointing to an adjoining hill. "It's pretty hard for them to get provisions so I have formed a habit of taking over their staples for the week; and then the other way is a bunch of college lads who appreciate Mary's cookies and some of her other goodies, and I take them over. I don't think I could enjoy my breakfast without the airing these visits give me."

"You certainly keep busy, don't you?"

"Well, I don't think I am exactly lazy."

"Good morning!" Mrs. Emerson broke in, "I am as hungry as I can be; where is the Rabbi?"

"Oh, he's down at the cottage—always eats breakfast with the boys—you'll pardon him?" Jean explained his absence.

"Surely; then we can breakfast now?"

"Directly," Jean assented.

Shortly after breakfast Enoch Glynn arrived by auto. After the greetings were over they all proceeded to the tower where Glynn succeeded in getting messages that Mr. Emerson had directed be sent from the broadcasting station in the Universal Radio Building.

Just before dinner all the guests gathered on the front porch.

"The Soul-Mates have quite an addition to their ranks to-day," Glynn ventured with a smile.

"Oh, has Jean told you about my name for you?" asked Clare.

"Yes, and I wish you'd tell me just how you struck it."

"The name seemed just right for you," she remarked seriously, as her glance took in the Rabbi and Jean as well as Glynn.

"A Rabbi—a Christian Scientist—and what do you style yourself, Jean?" Mrs. Emerson smilingly asked.

"I'm a hybrid Catholic!"

"That's a new one—how do you get that way?" Clare chuckled.

"Oh, you straight-laced Methodist, you wouldn't appreciate my position. I think I understand the Church as well as any priest, but I cannot be fettered with dogma, form, or ritual. Oh, I go occasionally to mass. It uplifts my soul and helps me to think—but I like to feel absolutely free."

"I am only straight-laced when mother is around," Clare retorted. "I like new things, whether they are religious or anything else."

"Glynn doesn't quite grasp Christian Science," said Jean, with a smile toward the other man.

"Yes, I'll admit it," assented Glynn; "I can't grasp the meaning of Science, but I know it has helped me. But, Miss Emerson, why do you call Jean, a Soul-Mate?"

Clare became serious: "He has often said that he prayed that he might have a soul more than equal to the fullness of life; to the emptiness of death;—yes, even far beyond any conception of those things, past and present. He wants a fuller soul-life, a broader soul-nature, and to secure a deeper insight into the mystery of being, of life and death, of the

very essence of existence and non-existence. Isn't that it?" She turned questionably to Jean, whose face had taken on a glow as though he had just looked upon a very beautiful thing.

"Yes, my prayer has been that I might discover a mode of life for the soul, so that the inner consciousness might not only conceive of such being, but actually enjoy it on this earth. I wished to search out a new set of ideas on which the mind should work to attain moral perfection. All our present conceptions are based on tradition, I aim to kindle a spark for the new fire that will consume all present thought."

"Rather a large undertaking," scoffed Mrs. Emerson, "I think the old world has gone along pretty well in its present state, don't you, Mr. Glynn?"

"Yes and no!" Glynn parried. "We have done pretty well, I'll admit; but we could have done better, and we can do better!"

"What I propose," Jean resumed, "is to co-ordinate the action of the soul and body and thus make human endeavor automatic. Through the perfection of soul-life, Man's life will become constantly happy, passion will disappear and love be uppermost. Health will be forever guaranteed, sickness unknown. I do not want soul-life after death only, but here on earth."

"How different from the Heart-Mates' motto!" Clare thought, as her eyes met Jean's.

"Your mind, Jean, ever voyages in strange, uncharted seas," was the characterization made by the Rabbi; "but who knows, you may discover a new continent of ideas—a Continent of Soul Life!"

Suddenly Glynn cried out, "Look at the airship!"

"Probably, it's Cornie!" Mrs. Emerson said: "I met him yesterday morning and he said he might fly up here."

Jean and Clare involuntarily exchanged a quick glance,

which the latter's mother caught. She frowned as she watched the plane approach.

They all went down on the lawn beside the house and greeted Cornie as he deftly brought his ship to earth. "Hello everybody!" he called out, "just dropped down to see you."

"Dropped is right," Glynn chuckled. "Hope you didn't hit any radio waves."

Cornie laughed, "Nope, I was very careful."

As the others sauntered back to the porch, Cornie kept alongside Clare, and whispered: "You know I'd fly to the ends of the earth to see you!"

"Oh, I thought you came up to see mother?"

"You know better than that—I broke a dozen dates to come here. I was so lonesome."

She threw him an amused glance.

"You seem to have no trouble in keeping yourself busy without me," she pouted, but I have been enjoying Jean's company, so we are quits."

"I suppose you two have been discussing your souls again," Cornie replied sarcastically.

"More serious things than Beauty, I will admit."

Her companion did not quite like the sound of that last remark. It might mean that Jean had been making love to his girl. "Well, now he has had his turn, I will take mine," he asserted, arrogantly assuming her submission.

"He is our host, I owe him some attention even if your lordship is here," she mocked. Clare never could accustom herself to Cornie's air of ownership, as if she were his to command.

"You better fasten that ship of yours pretty tight or you will be minus one aeroplane. There is some breeze blowing up," Jean cautioned his brother, as he returned to Clare's side.

As Cornie moved away, Jean could not help but ask, "Do you care more for my brother than for me?"

She was spared an answer by the arrival of the others of the party who had been strolling about the grounds.

When Cornie came back from attending to the plane he said to Clare, "I'd like to stretch after my ride; wish you'd take a walk with me."

She looked questioningly at Jean before answering, "Go ahead," he said, with none too good a grace. "I'll keep Mrs. Emerson company."

As the two passed down the steps, Mrs. Emerson's gaze followed them. "Cornie is such a dear boy," she said; and then, as if it were a mere passing thought, "Do you suppose, Jean, that your father will leave him more than yourself?"

"How should I know?" was the somewhat rude response. "I never think about such things."

"I just thought—possibly his being in the business with your father, you know."

"I never noticed that he spent a great deal of time in dad's office; but it is his money, I guess he can do as he pleases with it," Jean retorted tartly.

"Of course, I only wondered." It was rather plain to Jean that the desire was parent to the question. He realized that Cornie had a warm adherent in the youthful-appearing mother whom he was constantly complimenting.

"I think a man should settle down when he marries, that is, go in business or something," continued Mrs. Emerson.

"I never want to settle down," Jean felt compelled to say. "There are too many so deeply rooted that nothing can move them. They sink down in the slough of selfish routine, and stagnate."

"A lot of time apparently is wasted in keeping ourselves in trim," was the thought that his statement brought forth. "I always say that I wish it didn't take so much trouble and time to keep thin, and one's face and hair in condition to

be presentable; but it's part of the spirit of our times—to grow old is to die."

"That sounds like Cornie," thought Jean; "only he would put it, 'To be ugly or homely is a crime and an outrage against my sensibilities.'" Somehow Clare's mother always irritated him. He never could agree with her views however much he desired to placate her.

As soon as Clare and Cornie were out of sight of the others, Cornie put his arm around the girl and drew her to him. While she could feel his heart beat rapidly, it seemed out of harmony with hers, and no flush of love overcame her as when Jean had carried her. But while, when Cornie lightly touched her lips with his and said, "You little beauty, you know I am just wild about you," she gave him a gentle shove in remonstrance, she nevertheless smiled her pleasure at his vehemence.

After dinner, the party sat on the porch admiring the gorgeous afterglow of the sunset on the miniature mountain peaks.

"I have never cared for the Catskills," Mrs. Emerson began, "they seem so much more plebian than the Adirondacks."

"I like it here, it seems just right," Jean disagreed with her; "these mountains," his gesture took in the whole outlook, "are not as big as the Adirondacks of course, but they seem more human—I can grasp their meaning better—they are not too awesome. One loses contact with the earth but still has its pattern at his feet!"

Mrs. Emerson shrugged her shoulders as if to intimate that his opinion did not count, and suggested a game of bridge.

"Jean doesn't play," Clare informed her mother.

"Perhaps Mr. Glynn—" Mrs. Emerson began.

"Neither the Rabbi nor I play," said that gentleman. "We'll take a walk, if you don't mind."

"Very well, we can get along with a dummy—three handed—I couldn't stand it here all evening without a game," she retorted crisply.

"Go right ahead," Jean said, "I want you to enjoy yourself, don't mind me."

"No young man's education is complete, in these times, unless he plays a good bridge game," was the comment of Clare's mother, as she rose with an imperious toss of her head, which seemed always to be held at such an angle that she appeared to be looking down on the world in general and particularly on whomsoever she was addressing.

"Mother," Clare could not conceal her disapproval, "it isn't indispensable, you know. And Jean did his duty in France just the same as Cornie, even if he couldn't play bridge."

The latter glanced at her with a hurt look, feeling intuitively that she was defending his brother, while Jean's face plainly showed his appreciation.

"Of course, both boys did their duty nobly and thank God, they were spared," declared Mrs. Emerson abruptly.

"Let me put a table out here," said Jean, hastening inside to get one. Mrs. Emerson, Clare, and Cornie settled down to the enjoyment of their game, and Jean slipped out almost to the end of the big ledge on which the house was located and took his favorite position at full length on the ground. The night seemed to wrap him in her cloak of darkness and silence—but his thoughts raced on!

He suffered a certain naive apprehension. He felt positive that Clare loved him, still he had an indefinite fear and hopeless sinking feeling. It was not the thought of the possibility of her refusal to marry him—there was nothing sensual in his love. That was a pure feeling that asked only the pleasure of enjoying his beloved's company, of having her close to him, that he might gaze into her eyes. Somehow they seemed to be the means of expressing her love.

Eyes are the lamps of the soul, the windows of the heart.

One may sit opposite a fellow being, and if their souls are not attuned he might as well be a million miles away, for all that he can read of the inner being of the individual actually so close. But once let the souls of these same ones meet in a common love, a deep spiritual feeling thus results—an illumination, a clarity of view as into clear limpid water. The eyes are as mirrors reflecting the love light to and fro.

Jean had a dim foreboding of the uncertainty of their future. He who boasted of his liberty of action, felt a thick gloom retarding him. The conception of his own brother as his rival would not rest for a second in his mind. He must subdue himself, conquer his longings, use his self-restraint. But man's passions are like the running water; once it has overflowed it can never be restored, so having been indulged, they cannot be restrained, whether the passions be pure or impure. Water can only be controlled by dikes and wells, so the passions must be ruled by the laws of propriety and conscience, by the dictates of the soul.

Man has his high and low emotional tides. Jean was in the midst of a depressing low tide when, as if from the great space surrounding him, Clare's sweet voice emerged: "What is my perfect one dreaming of now?"

He shrank from her like one fording a cold stream. "Please do not jest. I feel so insignificant tonight. I have been in a torment of fear that I might lose you, my soul's desire; and all my fine thinking seems to fade into a single ardent wish just to be with you, to look into your eyes forever!"

"Jean, dear," she bent over and kissed him, "you are really like a little child, you want to play with me always."

"I want you to be my life playmate, my Soul Toy," he said simply.

"You forget we are no longer children, and must face real life. I hope you will always be my friend, no matter what the future may bring."

"My life, my soul, are yours, Clare, to the end of both—yours to command and theirs to obey!"

"You will always be in my heart, Jean, wherever I may be and whatever I may do." Again she stooped to kiss him—then was gone.

Jean jumped up quickly and followed her. The others were seated on the porch as Clare ran up the steps. Just as she reached the top one, she slipped and fell on the porch floor. Jean reached her quickly, and with Cornie helped her up.

"What was the idea?" Cornie jerked out angrily, "playing tag?"

The sweetness of her kiss was still on Jean's lips and he could not reply.

"I was clumsy—thought I was a kid—and found out I was an old woman," she said as she stood rubbing her ankle.

"Does it hurt?" her mother queried anxiously.

"It surely does, but I guess I can walk on it." She attempted to do so, but her foot gave way under her and Jean and Cornie carried her to the swing.

"You better go in," said Mrs. Emerson.

"Let me try Science!" begged Glynn, "I know I can help you. If my healer were here he would have you all right in a jiffy. I don't know how he does it, I really can't grasp it—but I can read to you and maybe you can. I never volunteer my aid but—"

"Thank you, Mr. Glynn, I think I would better go to my room, and then I will gladly have you read to me. I want to know more about Christian Science."

"Will you please call a doctor, Jean?" asked Mrs. Emerson, as she saw the flash of pain on Clare's face as they helped her to her room on the first floor.

"Mother, please don't get excited, wait and see how badly my ankle is sprained."

"There is one at Phoenicia, I can call if you wish," Jean explained.

Mrs. Emerson nodded. A little later she reported that Clare was feeling much better but would remain in her room, and: "Would Mr. Glynn please sit outside her window and read to her?"

Glynn excused himself, very importantly brought out his "Science and Health," and seating himself in front of Clare's window, began to read:—

"In Science, Man is the offspring of Spirit . . . . We cannot circumscribe happiness within the limits of personal sense. The senses confer no real enjoyment."

Clare thought to herself what pleasure the sense of resting her head on Jean's breast, of hearing his heart beat, of feeling his love permeating her senses, had given her.

"Nothing is real and eternal but God, and his ideas . . . . Matter possesses neither sensation nor life. . . . The only sufferer is the material mind," Glynn intoned softly.

Jean called out, "Isn't there anything we can do to aid in this cure?"

"Keep thinking 'God is love,'" answered Glynn. "That will put you in a proper frame of mind and aid the healing." Mrs. Emerson shrugged her shoulders in disdain.

"I think I can sleep now," called Clare. "Thank you so much, Mr. Glynn, I feel much better."

When the Scientist returned to the others, Jean said that he must tell Clare good-night. He went to her window and called, "Are you asleep yet, Clare?"

"No," she answered, "just about to go there—your friend has been trying to show me the way to find contentment, even in pain."

"I can tell you a surer and easier way," he said quietly.

"Oh do—I love short cuts!"

"If you will only love me as much as I do you, our souls will be released through the strength of our mutual love, and we will find contentment together."

She drank in his words with eagerness. "I like your plan much better—if only we could hand in hand wander over the earth in search of Happiness!"

"It is very difficult to make love through a drawn window shade," he jested, "but what is to prevent us making the kind of search you say?"

"The Reality of Life! Our saner natures will not let us follow our dreams, in which we annihilate time, space, the world—even our own bodies. Life cannot be all spiritual enjoyment, any more than entirely bodily pleasures. There must be a happy medium. But I really must try to get some rest."

"Indeed you should, and I would not for the world be the cause of your losing one second of it. So, pleasant dreams! and I do hope that your ankle will be all healed by morning!"

"Thank you, very much. Good-night!"

## CHAPTER VII

IT WAS with a quick, confident step that the Scientist walked to Clare's door and knocked sharply.

"The little ankle is all well this morning," he affirmed as he entered at her invitation.

"Not quite, but a great deal better, thank you," she smiled as she answered from the day-bed where she was reclining.

"You see," he chuckled, "it always works, and I can't grasp what does it either." Mournfully he shook his head.

"You better have your breakfast here, my dear," said Mary, the housekeeper, as she came into the room.

"No, I am quite sure I can hobble out to the table."

"Of course she can," confirmed Glynn glibly.

"Arnica is a wonderful thing, Mr. Glynn," announced Mary. "I have never known it to fail, if no bones are broken. I went in and poulticed her ankle several times during the night."

"Sh, Sh!" breathed the Rabbi, who came up to the door. "Now you have done it; spoiled Glynn's day!"

"No, it was Science. What good can arnica do?" sneered the latter. "Bosh! didn't I read to her, and I gave her absent treatment several times during the night, too. Thought you always breakfasted with the kiddies."

"I am making an exception to-day—Miss Emerson's account."

With the Scientist on one side and the Rabbi on the other, Clare slowly made her way to the table. When they were seated, Glynn continued, "It is wonderful what Science can do. It never fails, if properly applied."

"That's right," mocked Jean, "always leave room for an alibi; but surely there is something to it. Look at the thousands who believe in it!"

"Science came on to the world stage at exactly the right moment," the Rabbi told them. "Fifty years ago it would have been laughed off the face of the globe; fifty years from now who knows what growth it may have attained, or whether it will exist at all."

"Christian Science, New Thought, Ethical Culture, Theosophy, Spiritualism and all the new religions, fads and fancies, are the result of a cry for freedom of thought—that the old religions have refused," Jean stated as his belief.

"When people eat unripe grapes and drink wine fresh from the wine-press, they must expect to suffer sooner or later," added Mrs. Emerson, as her version of the new cults.

"Science offers a panacea for all ills. You know the growth of the patent medicine business—well here you have it—ennobled and spiritualized—a mental pill that tries to reach body and soul and often intoxicates into a somewhat delirious happiness," the Rabbi explained.

"Well, now that we have conclusively proved that we are all exactly right in our ideas," jeered Clare, "someone can help me out on to the porch." Jean and Cornie made a seat of their hands and carried her to the swing.

"As soon as the doctor comes, we've got to get started. I'll be late for an engagement with my dressmaker now," Mrs. Emerson said sharply.

"Doctor?" Clare asked in surprise.

"Jean called Dr. Swift from Phoenicia at my insistence. The doctor said he'd be over the first thing this morning, I want to be sure there are no broken bones."

"How foolish, Mother. I could tell if there were any. It is much better."

"There he comes now!" Jean called as he caught sight of an approaching auto.

The doctor was introduced and Clare said to him: "I rather feel you have been brought here unnecessarily."

"Let me see the ankle, Miss Emerson," the latter re-

plied. "That will tell the story." After a brief examination he told her that it was severely strained, and that she ought not to step on her foot for at least a week. "While not serious, such bruises become very painful if proper care is not taken," he warned. She was to continue the arnica poultices and keep the affected part bandaged very tightly.

"Please stay awhile and rest yourself, Doctor," Jean hospitably requested. "I want you to meet a noted Christian Scientist, Mr. Glynn. I am sure you will interest each other." Then he called loudly to Glynn, "Here is a bogeyman, a real doctor—come and meet him."

The Scientist approached the doctor with outstretched hand.

"Glad to meet you, Doctor. Did Miss Emerson tell you of her great healing?"

"Not exactly," replied the medical man, as he looked to the rest with a puzzled expression.

"You surely are being well looked after, Clare," her mother told her, "you have a doctor and a Scientist aiding you."

"I will take the doctor's pill, and let the Scientist read to me," was her ready reply.

"But really you can't do that," objected the Scientist. "They will not work together."

"I will take each separately then," she laughingly replied.

"I wonder, will *Materia Medica* ever be mixed with Science?" asked the Rabbi, who had sauntered up to the group.

"I am not fool enough not to realize that there is something to it," admitted the doctor.

"You see, you hear!" gleefully cried the Scientist.

"We are using mental suggestion and will-power ourselves in many cases of mental and nervous disease; but neither am I so foolish as to think that Science can heal a valvular heart-leak or knit a broken leg unaided. Some seemingly remarkable cures are merely nature taking its course alone; because

all the doctor can do is to help nature set in action her own healing powers. But many imaginary troubles are made to vanish through Science."

"You see, doctors use it!" Glynn selected that part of the doctor's statement that pleased him.

"Is that a recommendation or not?" Jean inquired ironically.

"French surgeons use hypnotism, to some extent, instead of anæsthetics. We are on the threshold of great discoveries. The witchcraft of our ancestors is the psychic phenomena of the present time. Science has touched on the new era."

"So Science will find its fruition in Medicine?" asked Mrs. Emerson shrewdly.

"Rather Medicine recognizes the natural limitations of Science," answered the doctor; "but really I must leave now. Very glad to have met you all. And keep off that foot, Miss Emerson—good-day."

Mrs. Emerson gave voice to her plans: "Clare, Cornie has offered to ride you to 'World's End' in his ship, so I think Mr. Glynn and I would better get a start; and perhaps the Rabbi would like to ride back with us?"

"I am sure I would be very much pleased to do so. I must get back."

"We will start in the plane right after you've gone," Cornie said.

"What's the hurry?" Jean objected.

"I think it would be well to wait until the sun gets a little stronger; a few hours more or less," Mrs. Emerson suggested.

"Very well," Cornie agreed.

"Take good care of our little girl," Mrs. Emerson ordered Cornie, as she drove away.

"I've got to spend about an hour going over the plane; you'll excuse me?" Cornie asked Clare regretfully.

"Surely. Go right ahead. Jean will keep me company."

After Cornie left they remained for some time in silence, in that sweet companionship that needs no words, and watched the clouds balancing like gigantic puffs of steam, ghost ships sailing by in white fleets. It was a day when the air was so clear that a view for many miles could be had, and they discovered new glories in the familiar scene.

"Clare, many a morning, when I am here alone, I jump out of my bed about dawn, throw off my night-clothing, and climb out of my window as God made me! I revel in the feeling of the touch of the dew on the grass, the 'good-morning' whispered by the swaying trees, and the glory of the brightening heavens. They come to me as at no other time—I defy man-made restrictions—all artificialities. I feel I am a part of all nature; no human impediments retard my thoughts—I am free from every trammel—free body and soul! I sprawl at full length in the grass. I grasp the roots. I erase from my conception all traditions—all knowledge of ages gone by—I stand face to face with Nature—the mysterious, unknowable; I commune with my God! I feel like the man primeval; the world is at my feet—I am Adam in the garden—only lacking an Eve—you, my dear—to make this Paradise!" Jean ended his rhapsody abruptly, turning a glowing face to the girl.

"You are the eternal Adam, hoping, praying, dreaming," was her only response.

"And you the everlasting Eve, made to help man reach heights impregnable without your aid!"

"Eve tempted Adam. I would hold you back, down to earth, for I am afraid to climb too high. I am too earthly for you, Jean."

"It was through Eve's tempting Adam, that the Book of Knowledge was opened forever and the distinction between right and wrong realized. The eternal struggle, through which we gain the heights, would never have been started had Adam refused to secure the apple for Eve."

They luxuriated in their poetic dreams for a time, when Clare murmured: "Your whole being has one purpose. Your soul desire is the central clue to your existence. While I am many-sided, at least two-sided, I am just as earthly as soul-like."

"You are the normal, healthy individual; I am a crazy dreamer!" he humbled himself.

"No! No!" she cried. "You are a saint! Yes, a saint! No selfishness, no impure passions, you are my ideal!"

"To be your ideal—what more could I ask?"

"But to reach your ideal, to possess it, to call it your very own, would be to destroy your ambition. I would exile you from your paradise."

Cornie came back somewhat soiled looking. "I'll run in and clean up, then we can start any time."

Clare nodded—Jean sighed. "If only I could keep her here!" he thought.

"Will you bring my wraps?" asked Clare. "Then I will not have to go inside again."

When Jean returned Clare said softly, "This has been a wonderful week-end, but I am so sorry to have spoiled it by my clumsiness. I suppose all sweet memories have a touch of pain."

"I wish I could save you from ever suffering; I'd willingly give my life!" said Jean.

"Thanks!" She patted his hand. Cornie saw the gentle touch and hurriedly said, "Well, let's be off."

The brothers carried her to the ship and lifted her in. Cornie started the engine and climbed in after adjusting their headgear and coats. Jean undid the fastenings and the car rolled away.

He waved good-bye as Clare and Cornie sailed off into space. It seemed as if he were letting Clare go forever with his brother. The thought came, that if the latter ever asked him to surrender Clare to him, he would do so. The gentle,

loving, soul-filled character could no more withstand the affirmative, egotistical, passion-filled brother, than the breeze of the fan can prevail against the hurricane.

What exhilaration, what freeing of earthly bonds, to sail in the air like birds! to have spread beneath you a picture-puzzle of Earth, fitted together nicely with land and water, mountains and plains, cities and farms, lights and shadows—for you to select the piece that will fit with any mental picture you may form. But accustomed to aviation as Clare was, this flight seemed different from any other that she had ever taken. There was an intensity of feeling in Cornie that communicated itself to her own being and made her feel vaguely fearful. She was trusting her life to him just as she would if she actually were married to him. She closed her eyes.

Suddenly the motor stopped! Cornie shouted: "Sit still—don't move! It'll go again in a second!" It was like a sudden clamor of fire bells—shouts—rushing of people—then instant silence! Complete—terrifying!

They began to fall! In the next few awful seconds the wind whispered to Clare, "Death! Death!" She looked below; the earth was flying up to meet them; they would be dashed against it!

"Jean! Jean!" she called silently. Now she knew! She never had loved anyone but Jean! She longed for him, she saw him before her! Still, as she watched Cornie working feverishly at the mechanism, she thought how helpless Jean would be in such an emergency. "Would Cornie succeed in getting the motor to respond to his urging?" Her voice was gone, she could not ask him! Her heart seemed to have stopped beating. There was no bottom—she would keep falling—falling forever—falling with Cornie—to rise with Jean! Her brain was stunned—her thoughts muddled!

At last the propeller started to revolve once more; the motor pounded—pounded—church bells ringing in her ears—

"Life! Life!" the wind called. The Jean she had visioned faded into a real Cornie. They began to rise, higher and higher, and proceeded on their way.

"How wonderfully quick you worked!" She could not restrain this expression of her admiration as she regained hold on herself. "We really were in danger, weren't we?"

"Well, now that it is all over, yes. If I hadn't been able to straighten out the trouble when I did, in a few seconds more it would have been too late. We would have been goners sure enough."

She shuddered, as she drew closer to him as if to share some of his confidence.

With no further mishaps, they continued on their way until they landed at their destination at "World's End."

It seemed an eternity since they had left "Soul's Desire." But actually only a little time had passed.

Later in the day Cornie returned to New York. During the following ten days, until Clare wrote him that her ankle was entirely healed, he sent flowers to her daily.

PART IV  
CLASHING WORLDS



## CHAPTER VIII

THE LONG shadows of the late fall afternoon were creeping in through the windows of Walter Emerson's private office across the open stretch of floor and up the east wall.

Murphy, just outside, could hear his chief's ceaseless pacing back and forth, now across the rug, now on the bare spaces close to the window, then wheeling about and back again. The sound of his footsteps made Murphy nervous, it was so unusual for his chief to give any evidence of his feelings. He could picture him with his hands clasped behind his back or mussing up his hair, his face with new wrinkles and his shoulders in an unaccustomed stoop.

"What a hectic time the last two weeks has been!" thought Murphy. Watching with eagle eyes, the master and secretary had seen the dips and bulges of a forced market in Universal Radio. With every rise, with every fall, Emerson bought and bought while powerful financial interests were checking his efforts. As he bought they sold short, and forced him to keep on buying in order to hold what he already had acquired at a high price.

The buzzer rang. Murphy jumped. "See what it is now," Emerson ordered. The secretary turned to the small adjoining room where a ticker clicked off the stock market quotations.

"Twelve," he said.

"Twelve? My God, won't they ever stop pounding? Call Glynn!"

As soon as the broker was on the wire, Emerson called into the phone, "How many have we now?"

"Your holdings approximate eleven million shares," was the answer.

"Eleven million!" Emerson repeated. "At the high price I've agreed to pay—if they continue to force it down—I'll have to let go! But I'll stop them yet—I'll not let go!"

"You've got to!" was the reply, "our brokers are getting uneasy—demanding more collateral as Universal goes down. I think it's time to quit!"

"Come over right away," Emerson ordered, as he banged up the receiver.

He turned to Murphy. "Quit? Hell! How can I? Doesn't he realize how deep I am in now? I haven't the money to pay up for all I have bought, and I've borrowed every cent I can lay my hands on. If Wildner wasn't out to get me, I'd win. I've my seventy-five per cent now. But he's taken the control of my market away. I had to buy at his price and then by selling short, he reduced the value of my stock."

He started his cell-walking again. Murphy tip-toed out.

Glynn arrived. His usual calmness was disturbed. He looked distinctly worried.

"What shall I do?" Emerson asked Glynn.

The latter could not talk. "The chief asking for orders! It showed he was shaking!" Glynn silently brooded. At last he said, "There is only one thing for you to do now. You can't hold out. You are absolutely at Wildner's mercy!"

"My God! It's true! But I can hold out for a few days more; maybe the market might go up, then I could hold on."

"But if they continue to shove it down?"

Emerson shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose it means the end."

They were interrupted by the buzz of the telephone. Emerson took up the receiver. "Well?"

"Mr. Wildner wishes to see you at once, if convenient," Murphy's voice came over the wire.

"All right, ask him to come over."

"What do you suppose he has up his sleeve now?" Emerson asked.

"He's going to offer to buy you out. He's getting tired of the fight."

"No, he's too far over-sold. He's several million short! He's coming to me!"

"I wish that were true!" Glynn smiled sadly. "You forget he has unlimited resources behind him. One might almost say the whole country is behind him, with his banking connections."

Emerson stopped him. "It's true, I'm alone, but I think his friends are probably tired of putting up for him. I've decided, Glynn, I'm going to hold out for fifteen. They'll come to me yet!"

"I am afraid you are making a mistake, Emerson."

"Mistake! Hell! Firmness—that's what's needed in an emergency like this. I'll not give in. Universal is my life blood!"

"Good luck to you then; I'll be going."

"Good-bye; I'll let you know what he says."

"Don't forget you'll have to put up more collateral soon or be wiped out," Glynn shot out as he left.

Emerson started to resume his pacing but suddenly sat down, realizing that he must pull himself together in order to give the appearance of indifference.

Wildner arrived. No words of civility were wasted. "Well," began Emerson, "We've had some fight, eh!" He was trying to exhibit cock-sureness.

"*Have had* is correct," Wildner jeered.

Emerson look up quickly, "It isn't over yet, by any means."

"You have some very, very pressing personal obligations," Wildner began in a matter-of-fact tone, "which necessitate your disposing, under certain conditions, of all of your interests in Universal Radio to me at twelve dollars a share. The

alternative is to hold out until your stock is worthless and your interest is gone anyway."

"You are not very optimistic as to my future."

"To the contrary—I am, very—provided the condition—"

"Provided?"

"A certain suggestion I recently made to you."

"Relative to what?"

"The subject of our last interview."

Emerson looked at him steadily, a look of hatred growing stronger every second, then slowly bit off his words: "So my daughter is the price—of my business salvation—is that it?"

Wildner shrugged his shoulders. He was amused at Emerson's bluntness.

"I don't think your daughter would approve your manner of referring to her friendship with my sons."

"Friendship! Bah! Why bandy words? You think you are in a position to force me to do anything you may ask. You not only want to kick me out of the business I have built up, but you want to steal my daughter from me—and you hold up the ghost of poverty before me to scare me into acceptance. It's really very childish. Thank God I'm not yet a pauper, and I don't have to sell my child to you!"

"Then I take it you are not yet ready to call, 'enough'!"

Emerson was fast losing control of himself. "You expect to administer further punishment for my refusal to obey orders, I suppose?"

"Well, we will not exactly lay down on the job at this stage of the game, but I had hoped I might be able to save you something, for your daughter's sake."

"My daughter's sake! You mean your son's sake!"

"You have a curious habit of interpreting what I say!" Wildner chuckled as he replied.

"I do not think either of us can gain anything by prolonging this conversation!" said Emerson.

"Yes, you are right, but I had hoped you might see the light. I really have no desire to force you to the wall, but you insist upon making me do so. However, you may change your mind, but of course you understand the twelve offer is only good for to-day. I'll bid you good-morning!"

Emerson nodded curtly and rang for Murphy to show his visitor out. "Well, Murphy," he began after Wildner had gone, "he's offered me twelve."

"And you—?"

"Turned it down. Why not? I'm not through yet. Get Glynn."

When Emerson had his broker on the wire he said: "Put her up ten points to-day, Glynn, no matter how many you have to buy. I'll show 'em there's life in the old boy yet!" He smiled as he prepared to renew the fight."

However, late in the day when he read his broker's report, he found that although the latter had actually succeeded in forcing Universal Radio up to 20 during the day, it had closed at 10!

It was very evident that the shorts had sold much more than he had bought, and the net result of the day was a greater debt for the new stock and a net loss of two points on all his enormous holdings.

Just before he left the office he said to Murphy, "We can hold out one day more." Then to himself, "If worst comes to worst, Clare can marry Cornie Wildner! It really isn't an unimaginable thing. Of course I did want a man for a son-in-law, but if the fates decide otherwise I suppose I will have to be content. Let me see, twelve dollars a share would let me out, with enough left to start in again."

## CHAPTER IX

WITH the opening of the market the next morning, a determined selling movement was started. Thousands of shares of Universal Radio were dumped on the market. Emerson stood in his office at the tape and saw the opening quotation—10—which quickly fell to 9. He called Glynn. “Why aren’t you buying?”

“The banks have closed down on you—the brokers refuse to take any more on your account,” Glynn replied.

“Good God! He’s got me! By noon I’ll be wiped out,” exclaimed Emerson as he banged up the receiver and began pacing the room like a madman. “He’s got me! He’s got me!” he kept repeating.

Finally Murphy could stand it no longer. He came into the room without being called. “Did you ring, sir?”

“Ring!—No—Yes—get Wildner on the phone!”

Murphy took up the receiver and told the operator. In a moment she rang back. “Mr. Wildner is in conference—he cannot be disturbed,” was her reply.

“Good God! What can we do now? He will not see me!”

“Perhaps if you went to his office?” Murphy suggested.

Emerson hesitated just a second, then said sharply: “Get my coat and hat!”

Urging the chauffeur to hurry, he rushed to the imposing headquarters of the international banking firm of Cornelius M. Wildner & Co., just off Wall Street, entered the office and asked to be shown to Mr. Wildner at once. His wish was complied with, and he was ushered into the presence of the head of the firm.

“I’ll accept your offer of 12!” Emerson announced brusquely. His leonine look spelled defiance, but his very presence in this office belied his appearance.

"I withdrew that offer, 12 is out of the question now. I believe Universal is 8 at present."

"I will not take less than 12."

"Very well. Then there is no use of your remaining here further." Wildner turned to the papers on his desk.

Suddenly Emerson's voice broke. "For God's sake, Wildner—have a heart!"

Wildner smiled in his cold insinuating way. "Heart? My dear sir, this is an affair of hearts, or I wouldn't offer you anything. I can wipe you out of Universal Radio as clean as the end of my desk." He swept his hand suggestively over its smooth surface, as he spoke.

Emerson replied hesitatingly: "It's pretty tough to see one's life work hang in the balance." His voice had sunk almost to a whisper, as though speaking more to himself than to the other man.

"A speculator like you ought to be prepared for such emergencies as this," Wildner answered coldly.

"I've always played sure things, Wildner. I've never bucked anyone like you before."

"Well, I will outline my last and only proposal to you."

"You mean your ultimatum?"

"Still choosing words, I see. Let me make myself clear. We will buy your eleven million shares for nine dollars a share; you will remain as president of Universal Radio at a salary of two hundred thousand a year. Cornie will be chairman of the board. We will not object if you buy Universal Radio stock, but none more than ten per cent. You must understand that you lose control of Universal for good. Of course you will be free to leave whenever you wish. And," he pronounced these words with especial emphasis, "you announce to-morrow morning the engagement of your daughter Clare to my son Cornie—before this deal is consummated. What do you say?"

"What can I say—your terms are quite liberal!" was the

sarcastic reply; "You seem to know the extent of my holdings. I am frank to tell you that nine dollars a share will not pay the loans I have on the stock I am holding."

"I know that, but I shall, nevertheless, expect you to deliver the eleven million shares free and clear," said Wildner remorselessly.

"That means—I will have to sell practically everything I have."

"You will still have your salary—and your genius."

"Genius—hell! Money is the last word in genius! You have that."

"Well, it is settled, then?"

Emerson nodded. "You are a generous foe," he said more affably. Then he put out his hand. Wildner took it, with the words, "And you are an opponent worthy any man's mettle! We'll be friends?"

The president of Universal Radio nodded. "Universal is my life's work. I will not desert it—and you will watch after my daughter?"

"I understand your feelings at this time," said Wildner, after a brief pause: "You ought to go home and rest."

Emerson pulled himself together. "Somehow I feel as though I want to be with you, as if I need you to go through with this," he said; "I wish you would run down to 'World's End' with me for the night. Perhaps Cornie might come—and I might say a word to Clare."

"A great idea. I'll meet you at three-thirty, and I'll send word down the line that an armistice has been signed between us. Things will stand as they are until our personal matter is arranged."

Again the two business giants shook hands, and Emerson left. Wildner sat for some time contemplating the figures on a sheet of paper he had slipped from under his blotter. "Napoleon met his Waterloo. My battle plans did not miscarry. Universal Radio will be a Wildner institution from

now on, with Emerson's genius at its disposal for a time at least." He smiled as though his silent musings pleased him. "And Cornie shall marry a real girl instead of someone off the streets!"

## CHAPTER X

AT THE time specified Mr. Wildner and Cornie called for Emerson, and together they boarded the train for Buttermilk Bay. The battle of the past few days was ignored and all chatted pleasantly.

Clare met them at the depot and was struck by her father's face. She knew he had been through some terrific struggle, but concealed her concern. Arriving at the house, Emerson took charge of Wildner, showing him about the grounds, while Clare and Cornie went to find Mrs. Emerson.

After dinner, Clare took Cornie to a nearby country club where they played bridge until midnight. Upon their return they found Mr. Emerson waiting on the porch. "Clare, I want to talk with you before you retire," he announced abruptly. The unusual circumstance of her father waiting up for her, and the tone of his address, informed Clare that he had something of importance to communicate, and that she would soon have the reason for his worried appearance.

Cornie bade them good-night and went to his room, while Clare seated herself and waited her father's message.

"Clare, my daughter," he began, "I realize you are still very young; at twenty-four one is not supposed to be very mature, but you have as much sense now as you will ever have," was his rather uncomplimentary conclusion.

"Thank you, Daddy," she said ironically. She knew this flippant start portended a more serious remainder.

"I have been a successful man, Clare, a very hard-working man. I was one of the first to recognize the commercial future of the Radio, and I built up the Universal Company, bit by bit; but I have not been satisfied for some time. I was hampered by other financial interests having their fingers

in my pie! I wanted to be free—free of old man Wildner and his crowd!"

Clare raised her eyebrows in surprise. She had not suspected that the Wildners were coming into the conversation.

"I made up my mind to attempt a colossal coup. If it had been successful I would have secured full control and been in a position to clean up on the Market. But I—well—I failed."

Clare could not speak. She felt her father's depression by more than his mere words.

"I would not give in on your account, Clare," he continued presently.

"My account?" the girl asked, startled.

"Yes, I—I wanted you to marry someone who could be a real son to us; who could take over my business when I was ready to quit; but I have known for a long time that Wildner had his eye on you for one of his sons."

"One of his sons?" Clare emphasized the first word of her query.

"Before he whipped me, he would have been satisfied with either. Now I know it's Cornie or nothing."

"What am I," demanded Clare tartly, "the pawn of your business deals?"

"Can't you see that I was fighting to free you, and I succeeded only in enslaving you. I will be frank. I am cleaned out. If you marry Cornie I remain with the Universal as its president, at a good salary. If you do not—I am out, entirely out. Now remember, I can take care of us, I am not holding poverty out before you; but when it becomes known, as it must, that I was cleaned out and kicked out of the Universal, even if I start over, you will no longer be the catch of the season you are to-day; your matrimonial desirability will be greatly lessened. Therefore I urge you for your own good to accept Cornie, while the taking is good," he ended with a wry smile.

"So I am to sell myself to the highest bidder."

"Cornie is crazy about you; the old man knows it. He also knows his son's failing for beautiful women, and he is afraid he may marry some good-looking chorus girl."

"And I am to be sacrificed to your busines need, and save Cornie from the ladies of the chorus!" was her bitter reply.

"It is your own welfare I am seeking. Your future means more to me than anything else."

"I wonder," Clare thought to herself, "if that's true—if his own vanity doesn't mean more?" But she said aloud, "And so we are to fool Cornie, to save ourselves?"

"He loves you; that is plain to see!"

"And what if I don't love him?"

"There are many girls who would be happy to have your chance!"

"Perhaps I love someone else!"

"The brother? Well, he's out of the question. I'll admit I'd have preferred someone else than Cornie, but the other one is impossible!"

"Your decision is quite irrevocable, I suppose?" she said coldly.

"Clare, be sensible! You hold your future in your own hands. Don't think I am binding you, or demanding that you marry Cornie. But I understand from old man Wildner that Cornie is to get the bulk of his money; so with the other, you'd get love in a cottage all right—but if you really want him, maybe the old man will be satisfied. Refuse both—and who knows what the future may bring! Your mother and I are deserving of some consideration."

"Mother? She's been shoving him at me ever since I was old enough to go on the marrying list. I can't answer you to-night, I must have time to think it over."

"Love! Hell!" her father muttered to himself. "She must be blind not to see the necessity of acting on my suggestion."

In his room he recovered his composure as he decided, "No child of mine could be such a damn fool as to turn down so splendid a chance! She will do what I want, but is smart enough to make us all believe that she is master of the situation. What an awful thing it would be if she refused! Sacrifice! Bah! The girl doesn't recognize a good thing when she sees it!" was his disgusted thought.

It was with a bewildered feeling that Clare stumbled to her room and threw herself on the bed. Sobs racked her. Somehow she had the sensation of being choked and robbed! Choked by the force of circumstances, robbed of her love, of her right to live her own life. She had allowed herself to revel in the delightful joy of being loved by both brothers; now she admitted that it was Jean only whom she loved, Jean the ethereal, the unworldly child—rather than Cornie, the earthly, sensuous man-of-the-world. She had arrived at the cross-roads, the parting of the ways. Should she choose the uncertain path with Jean, an uncharted route, endure perhaps hardships to which she was unaccustomed? Or should she decide on the opposite path with Cornie—an apparently safe road—the same that her mother and her friends had travelled—and enjoy the advantages of position, wealth and society which had become a part of her existence? These were the doubts and the questions that confronted her in the long quiet hours.

She undressed finally and crept into bed. What the time was, she did not know or care. It had no meaning for her. Her whole future life, she held in the hollow of her hands! How should she mold its form? She wondered if the decision were hers to make, or if she were not a creature of chance, a bubble buffeted on the ocean of life!

"Am I my own master?" she asked half aloud. The little voice of her soul crying for freedom, the power to control her future in the path of true happiness, kept answering: "You are! You are! Do not let the Bluebird escape you!"

But the louder voice of heredity and custom, of physical desire, would not be suppressed. It voiced its insistent demand for comfort, ease, and earthly pleasures, saying: "No! No! You must do what your parents expect of you! You will never be satisfied in a spiritual paradise with Jean. Your thirst for life cannot be so allayed. You must have travel, gay friends, Parisian frocks, jewels and parties. These are all within your grasp if you accept Cornie. You are not the ruler of your life! Destiny forces you to say 'Yes' to Cornie."

"And what would come of my union with Jean?" she continued her brooding. "I would be isolated—and yet what bliss to be alone with Jean; no distractions to clog our spirits, to lessen the intensity of our love." She dreamily conjured up a beautiful future, until the tempter renewed its pleading.

"You overlook the devouring need for Cornie's aid and protection, if you want to take your fling in the society game. And remember your duty to your parents! And you know you never could endure life with Jean, you would soon be dreadfully bored."

The gnawing cry for Jean, her soul desire, would not be quieted. It made her almost frantic, but it was not strong enough to break the fetters of mind and heart that were slowly drawing her to a decision favorable to Cornie. Her heart was in a torment, her soul in a ferment! She swayed back and forth, but at last the sleek philosophy of the modern woman, that makes physical comfort paramount, gained ascendancy. She surrendered! It was an unconditional surrender; she swept herself on to the conclusion that she actually loved Cornie, but in reality it was only an infatuation for what he represented, the sensual life of the body rather than the ethereal existence of the soul.

So infatuation is often mistaken for love, when there is as much difference between them as between the light of the candle and that of the sun; both of the former go under the

name of Love, and the latter of Light. The real Love-Light is as strong as the sun and burns its way into the soul, where it may be covered and suppressed and the candle permitted to give forth its weak glow, but sooner or later it must itself be destroyed by the more intense rays which cannot forever be held in leash.

The decision once made, she closed her eyes and contemplated what her new life would be. She visioned herself passing from one pleasure to another with Cornie her ever-faithful guide and lover, a society queen sought after and imperial in power. She pictured herself arrayed in fashion's latest creations, the envy of her friends and the center of every gayety. She had a feeling of complete satisfaction, but dozed off into troubled sleep.

Awakening some hours later with a shudder, she walked to the window, and looked down in the early morning light. The gardens were ablaze with September bloom, the smooth lawn was a velvety green. There came over her a sense of the eternal fitness of things. The sane regular life of the materialist seemed so much more desirable than the bizarre career of the dreamer. So does wordliness cloud the intelligence and dwarf the soul. Slipping a charming negligee over her pajamas, she reclined on a *chaise longe*. A calm feeling of satisfaction surged over her, a thankfulness for her beauty, as she viewed her piquant features reflected in her mirror and saw the contour and color of her cheeks, like a perfect peach.

She wondered how her mother would ask her for her decision. Mrs. Emerson was accustomed to having her own way, and when crossed developed instantaneously a violent temper. Clare could tell by a single glance, whether she had climbed out of the right or left side of her bed. Her early morning temperament was usually the result of a last moment interview with Mr. Emerson the night before. As that gentleman had a habit of appraising his own views as quite

the equal of those of his wife, these conferences were frequently stormy ones and often brought an unpleasant aftermath.

When her mother was in an uncertain mood, Clare tried to confine her part of their conversation to a simple "yes" or "no" as she divined which answer her mother expected.

But when Clare came down to breakfast, the stately, gracious hostess, showing the garden to Mr. Wildner, Sr., had discreet and smiling eyes and in a buoyant voice called her to come to them.

"My little girl," she announced with a bland and studied smile.

"Charming this morning," the dignified gentleman greeted her. "And this is the young lady whose praises Cornie is constantly drumming into my ears! I do not wonder the boy is head over heels in love with you. If I were not so old, I might be your courtier, too," he added smilingly.

"Better an old man's darling," you know," was her jaunty reply.

"No, youth for youth," he answered. "Oh the joy of being young together!"

"And of growing old side by side," interjected Mr. Emerson, as he approached the group and gave his wife a good-morning kiss.

"Where is Cornie?" asked Mr. Wildner crisply. He could not tolerate tardiness either at meal-time or in business appointments.

His son came hurrying from the stables just at that moment.

"Where have you been so early?" asked Mrs. Emerson.

"Give an account of yourself," his father added.

"For a canter over this great country; and I feel as fit as a fiddle!"

"We should all do the breakfast justice, this fine morning," declared the host as he led the way to the sunny room where it awaited them.

Later in the morning Clare and Cornie sat on the open terrace that surrounded the house.

"If you are not too tired from your ride, would you care to have a brisk game of tennis?"

"I am never too tired to do anything you may ask me. Sure. I'll play," Cornie said agreeably.

He then told her, apropos of the topic she had introduced, about a great tennis match he had played the previous winter at Palm Beach, with a strikingly beautiful French girl.

Clare thought, "He never sees ordinary women, and somehow a beautiful woman seems to be part of his every experience and pastime."

While they chatted, Mr. Wildner, Sr., and his host walked to the Bay. "Splendid view," volunteered the former; "why is it called Buttermilk Bay?"

"The old Puritans so named it," replied Mr. Emerson, "because the almost constantly shifting and circulating of the sea makes its waters a lacteal white."

"It looks like buttermilk now," chuckled his companion. "Is that Buzzard's Bay below us?"

"Yes, this heads the Bay. That little town over there," he pointed to the east, "is Jeffersontown. It was there Joseph Jefferson made his home."

Watching the sail-boats gliding over the beautiful little harbor, Cornie said to Clare, "This is more to my liking than the mountains. They sort of scare me with their bigness, their rawness. I feel out of my element. Here I am part of the developed country."

"A finished product," she suggested, with a smile.

"Smooth article, rather," he laughed.

Suddenly he grew serious, "Clare, do you realize how happy you would make my old man, if you would say the word now? He keeps telling me to get married, and I know he heartily approves of you."

"Playing safe, eh?" she queried. "Am I to marry him or your worthy self?"

"You know how I love you, Clare. I can't be coherent when I am asking you for the thousandth, or is it ten-thousandth time? to be my wife!"

"Perseverance, nothing like it," she told him.

"He who waits, always hopes. But he who does not wait is through," he added plaintively.

"He who waits may be a good 'waiter'—but is he a great lover? Still, I think that you have really waited long enough for your answer." She hesitated and looked shyly at him, then down to her lap filled with flowers which she was turning into garlands.

Cornie looked steadily at her, trying to discern her answer.

"What would there have been for you to remember if I had said 'yes,' the first time you asked me?" He gave a sigh of relief but let her finish. "Picture me doing just that, a sweet unresisting thing, smiling parents, nothing but fine weather in view and cash unlimited! Wouldn't you have been dreadfully bored? And could you call it by any pretense—love?"

His thought was that he was not particular how she accepted him so long as she did so, but all he could manage was, "My darling!"

"If you were just like I am," she continued without emotion—"I pride myself that I have higher ideals than you, beauty is not all to me—what a dull prospect I would have! Frankly, I can not conceive of discussing the desire of the soul with Jean for the rest of my days, but with you, life will be interesting, I am sure of that."

"Say 'yes,' my beauty, and the joys of the world will be at your feet. To call this lovely rose," he said, as he put his arm around her, my own, I would give my very soul."

"If you own one, Cornie. I am not so sure that you do. 'Yes,' is my answer."

"Thank God," he breathed softly.

"I will try to be ever beautiful in your sight, and perhaps, through the uniting of your love of beauty and my soul desire, a new entity, part of each, shall rise from our union!"

His kiss of fire seemed to scorch and burn her lips!

"Would you still love me if I grew old and ugly?" she questioned naively.

"That you could never do. My wife must always be beautiful," he answered unhesitatingly. "My love will be a fountain of Beauty to you," explaining his confidence.

"Let us descend to the present and call the folks. I want to watch mother's face when we tell her," Clare brought him to earth.

But her mother's features, schooled to cover her feelings when she desired, masked her intense satisfaction and she merely presented a smiling countenance, intended to impress the elder Wildner with the idea that it was he who should be grateful for her daughter's acceptance of his son.

Mr. Emerson could not conceal his joy and Wildner, Sr., plainly expressed his pleasure.

"Even this early in the day, we must have some 'Mums' to drink to their happiness," Mr. Emerson said as he rang for a servant.

"Marrying into a family with wine in the cellar, is like being handed gold on a silver platter," laughingly remarked Mr. Wildner. "I'll wager they will include Bimini or the Bermudas in their wedding trip or a run over the pond 'where the cup still flows.' "

"I don't need liquors any more, Father. Clare's beauty is enough to intoxicate any man."

"You susceptible tank!" Clare jeered her fiance, as he swallowed a brimming goblet of bubbles while the other glasses were being filled.

Mr. Wildner lifted his glass, "Here is to a long life and a happy one, my children," he toasted them.

"All the joys of the world!" contributed her father.

In the dim recesses of her inner being a tiny voice whispered to Clare, "To the wedding of a lost soul and a worldly heart!" but she refused to listen to the dim foreboding and gaily raised her own goblet: "To Beauty's playmate!" she declared. "And his Love Toy!" answered Cornie. She nodded as she thought, "How much more pleasant to be a Love Toy than a Soul Toy!"

The happy hours danced by as Cornie outlined to Clare his plans for their future life. No responsibilities, no worries, only pleasures unconfined! Joy and Fun would be the horses they would ride and Happiness the fox they would catch at the end of each day's exciting hunt! No big palaces, with their many servants, for her! no big business, with its responsibilities, for him! Together they would roam over the world's pleasure spots, resting where their whims led them.

"The World shall be our home and all Society our companions. You shall be Empress in Paris and Queen in London, as well as Madam President in New York! California and Florida shall be yours to conquer." He painted her future in glowing word pictures. And Clare, a little frightened by the glamour awaiting her, was overcome by the tenseness of his devotion.

## CHAPTER XI

IN THE quiet of her room, away from Cornie's impetuous love-making, doubts began to assail Clare and she wondered if he made love to every beautiful girl like this.

Hers was not the satisfaction to ask the fiancee's eternal questions, "Am I the first girl you have ever loved?" and "Are mine the first lips yours have met in a love-kiss?" because she knew his conquests were many. She even took a painful delight in picturing herself as the goal of his search, the end of his quest. "But what of the future?" she would question herself, in spite of all.

Late in the night of her engagement, she wrote the letter of her life. In every being's experience there comes a time when to some affinity of soul, he must pour out his innermost thoughts. He can never do it in person, but the pen must trace and the paper carry the words that could not be born of thought in any other manner. So, in utter abandonment to her soul desire, she wrote:

"My darling Jean:—

"Once to everyone comes a love so deep, so big, that it seems to stifle and yet to expand—to conquer and to free. Such is my love for you, Jean, an everlasting lily, pure and white as the new fallen snow, but destined, I fear, like the snow, to melt into water and saturate the earth with its loveliness. But no! we will baffle Fate and not permit our love to sink into the forgetfulness of the earth, but will freeze it into our souls—there to keep fresh their desires. Jean, I do not know how to find words to tell you, but this is a good-bye.

"I am going to marry your brother. Destiny forces me,

my senses compel me, my infinitesimal soul is not big enough—no, not brave enough—to face life with you, Jean.

“For Cornie, I am a fit companion—for you I would be an anchor that would hold you to earth when your soul’s desire is to fly to the heavens. I will admit to you only, Jean, to you alone, I do not love him! I love no one but you! You see how I am putting myself to the rack—forcing myself to confess to you. It is torture, Jean! But my soul compels me to go on—it will not let me stop!

“Jean, darling; I want you to know that your love for me is my dearest treasure, the hours that we have been together are the sweetest remembrances I have. If I were free, Jean sweetheart, I would fly to you and seek the security of your arms. But I am fettered by my own, yes, fleshy desires. I want all the things that you hate and Cornie likes! Do not blame my parents. They have something to do with it, of course. One is not adamant to their wishes, but it is only my own insatiable, greedy self, seeking my real desire, that has prompted me to do this awful thing—marry a man I do not love!

“I think I want you both. Is it not possible for you still to be, yes, my lover? Such a love as yours, Jean, it is not wrong for a wife to accept from another man. I want to feel you are a refuge to which I can always flee, that you are my life preserver to whom I can cling, if the waters of the life I am choosing overcome me and I sink. Then I may rise to your height—but only then.

“It is a hard role I ask you to perform, to be my silent mate, the background of my life, my City of Refuge! Will you fail me? Or help me to realize my soul desire?

“Your loving sweetheart,

“Clare.”

She did not read the letter over, but early the next morning posted it herself. She felt shrived, cleansed, purified, just why she could not tell, but she had been true to herself

for once in her life and had given expression to her real feelings. True Romance knows not Common Sense and is unacquainted with Falsehood.

Clare waited impatiently for Jean's reply, and when it came did not read it until in the seclusion of her room and the quietness of the night.

"My poor Spirit," the letter began, "how I have suffered in these few hours that seem like a life-time, since your message came! It was like becoming suddenly blind in a garden filled with the beauty and wonder of Nature, bathed with sunlight and swept with cool breezes. The gorgeous scene is still there, but I see it not! It has been taken from me—the warmth of the sun and the coolness of the wind still I feel—but oh, what a loss! I am overcome, overwhelmed by what you tell me.

"I do not blame you. I am unworthy of a love like yours. You say it is like a white lily—I am afraid Cornie may gild the lily.

"My only regret is that in trying to learn the lesson of Life, I have forgotten to live. How I suffer to think of you—not in another's arms, that means nothing—but to realize that another should look into your wonderful eyes and read there the depths of your soul!

"I fear for my own soul. I told you there were moments when in the ecstasy of soul prayer, through the glow of your love, I felt that I was actually in Heaven. This second I feel that I am in Hell—a hell of lost souls!

I will not give up! You ask me to be your background, your life line, to which you can cling when in need. Even that will I be! But promise to be true to you, I will not! For what you have done, I may do. Our love, I see now, is a greater, nobler thing than earthly affection. It rises above the necessity of physical nearness, of actual companionship. It recognizes not the limitations of space nor the impediments of Man.

"You are and always will be one with me no matter whom the law may call your husband! My soul demands you as its toy, my Soul Toy! It will not give you up!"

"It happens my own brother is to be your husband. We will therefore close the door to our love, lock it tightly in our breasts until God shows the way. Enjoy your life, taste every pleasure you may desire! I, too, will do likewise, and then—then—

"But no more. This is good-bye. You always can depend on me for help anywhere and anytime. I will be your sanctuary of safety, of peace. My poor soul, doomed to silence until called by you, will in your service express its desire.

"May you and Cornie be happy, is really my wish. I do want you to be happy, Clare. You must be happy! I could not live if you were otherwise. That is why I compose myself and say, 'You want Clare to be happy. If you love her truly, why complain? She is satisfied.'

"Remember no matter what happens, 'Soul's Desire' in the glorious Catskills is always waiting for you, and this poor mortal is subject to your orders to the end of his days. How shall I sign this?

"Your obedient servant,

"Jean."

Clare held the letter in her hand and stared unseeing from the window. "This is the end," was her thought. She had half-hoped he would rebel, would demand that she be true to her love and faithful to him. This renunciation she had not expected.

"Such unselfishness," she muttered; and prepared for bed with rather a satisfied mind: "An earthly husband to fulfil my every wish," she reflected, "and a spiritual lover waiting for me in case the first fails or I tire of the social round! It is like seeing the portals of the convent always open, and to have an opportunity first to taste all the joys of life."

But when her head at last reached her pillow she could no longer control the torrent of tears waiting to gush forth, because Real Love knows not Expediency and protests the Shackles of the World.

In response to telegrams hastily dispatched, Clare's friends and Cornie's satellites gathered for a house party on the week-end following their engagement.

Clare met Jean's personal congratulations with a calmness that surprised her, but felt the shudder that went through him when Cornie shouted, "How is my best man?"

Meta Murray said to her brother Clay as they strolled in the garden, "You can't tell me that she loves him and not Jean. Anyone who has eyes can see that. She is marrying him for his money!"

"Isn't he Jean's brother? Cornie will not get any more than Jean when their father dies. I think you are a little jealous, Sis, if I may say it."

"Jealous? No; but I do think that Cornie and I are better mated than he and Clare. She likes to enjoy every thrill that society can give, and pose as a saint! I think she considers herself a virtuous vamp! Me, jealous? I should say not—I am merely amused. Jean's her kind—but she knows he will probably distribute his millions to teach the Chinese or the Africans how to release their souls. They say he gives away most of his allowance now. I never knew Cornie to hand out anything—unless it was to a beautiful woman."

"Don't be a cat, Sis," her brother advised. "Clare is your best friend, remember that."

"If I can't talk to my own brother for Heaven's sake to whom can I?" she inquired, losing her patience with him.

"I believe in loyalty to my friends," he affirmed.

"Who said I wasn't loyal? I love Clare and you know it, but I can't help feeling that she will regret marrying Cornie," she declared positively.

"Having a family conference?" Jean asked as he came up to them.

"We thought it was going to be you instead of your brother," Meta faltered. "How will you ever get along without Clare—you were such close friends. Why didn't you grab her first?" she chided him sharply.

"One may enjoy the wonder of the mountains and have no desire to possess their majesty," he observed quietly, and walked away.

"Take that, dear Sister!" cried Clay in amusement.

"What did he mean by such a remark?" She affected her ignorance of his implication.

"I think he wanted to convey the idea that Clare was his without marrying her, who knows?" he flashed.

"Who knows?" she repeated.

"I never could understand Jean. For my part I am glad Clare isn't marrying him. I would hate to think of you being tied to such an eccentric fool," was Clay's final word.

At the dinner table Mr. Emerson suggested that they could get up two fivesomes and enjoy the nearby golf course. And immediately Clare announced: "Horto and Clay can play Cornie and me, and Meta and Eddie against Tillie and Jean."

"You know I can't play," complained Jean.

"Oh, I forgot," Clare replied. "You will have to play, Dad. Too bad Jim isn't here."

"Is there anything you can do?" Mrs. Emerson petuantly asked Jean. "No bridge—no golf—how can you get along? I wanted your father to go with me this afternoon," she said glancing toward her daughter.

"Well, we can play a threesome just as well, Mrs. Emerson," suggested Eddie Philbrick.

"Sh! I would rather play golf than go calling on new neighbors," whispered Mr. Emerson.

"Perhaps they are home-brew makers, you never can tell," jokingly remarked Clay.

"I suppose I better not let such a chance pass by, because my stock will go down some with a wedding coming on, and a new source must be found," he confessed.

"What will you do, Jean?" Clare inquired.

"I found an interesting book on your library table. I'll go down by the shore and read. Don't fret about me."

"Everybody get set! We must leave in half an hour if we are going to play eighteen holes," commanded Eddie. "How is the course, Mr. Emerson? I have never played here."

"It is a beauty, we are very proud of it. All rolling country and several picturesque groves, with a little stream for water hazards. I know you will enjoy it."

"What do you make it in?" Eddie asked with interest.

"Please do not embarrass me," replied Emerson. "I am only in the hundred class."

"What is par?"

"Seventy. Are you going to make it in that?"

"No chance, I am only a dub."

The golfers started for the links, Mr. and Mrs. Emerson for their call, and Jean to his book. He thought of his father and was sorry he had not met him, as he had left several days before his younger son's arrival.

In the evening rugs were thrown back and the party danced for several hours, to a victrola accompaniment.

Jean spent most of the time on the terrace, as he said he couldn't do the new dances.

Clare overheard Meta say to him: "What a treat it would be to teach you to be a regular fellow!"

"And what is a regular fellow?" he questioned amusedly.

"A man like Cornie!" she blurted without thinking.

He looked up in surprise, "Is he your ideal?"

She ignored the question. "Every man ought to consider it his duty to entertain his friends and join in their amusements."

"Is it necessary to drink, gamble, and run around with questionable women, to make one a regular fellow?" he queried frankly.

"A regular fellow doesn't discuss those things with his lady friends." She voiced disapproval of his question. She never would have objected with anyone else, but coming from Jean it seemed immoral.

"Beg your pardon, I had an idea the young ladies of to-day, especially my brother's lady friends," he grew rather sarcastic, "were quite free and frank in their discussion of sex."

"Sex, yes; but questionable women, that's different."

"A difference without a distinction," he concluded as Eddie came to claim her for the next dance.

"I can't understand him," Jean heard her say as she went into the house.

When he sat out a dance with Tillie Freer, he felt a closer kinship to her. "Let's take a walk to the shore, I would much rather do that than to dance," she cooed.

"Come along," said Jean as he took her arm. "Maybe we can forget the crowd and the fashionable pastimes, at Nature's side."

"Aint Nature grand?" Tillie laughingly remarked. "But seriously, I really do just adore Nature! It awes me. I feel speechless when I go through a beautiful garden or look at big mountains," the girl said, attempting to show herself in tune with Jean and with her surroundings.

Tillie was the type that always tries to understand the mood of her male companion and play up to his views. She had none of her own, but adopted those of her associate of the moment.

"Nature speaks a clear language to those who appreciate her, but as you say, she requires only a silent response; so beware you do not annoy her," Jean warned.

"I love Philosophy," announced Tillie, as they sat down on a rustic bench close to the water.

"Do you read much along that line?" the man asked.

"No, I have so little time for reading, but I enjoy discussing it."

"You must," he observed dryly; "what is your idea of the Freudian theory of Psycho-Analysis?"

"Oh tell me yours!" she gushed. "You must have such certain views," was the way she managed to dodge.

"Not now, let us talk of other things," he resumed. "Discuss Freud with a child like this! Better talk to one's self. But many a man wants just that type," he thought, "one who will listen to an oration on his life and his views, and then strenuously agree with him in everything he has said, although she may be bored to death."

The week-end passed with only one opportunity for Jean to meet Clare alone. He saw her early one morning, from his window, gathering flowers, and hurried out to her.

"Good morning, Miss Rosebud!" he greeted as he met her.

"Good morning, Mr. Violet!" she retorted; please do not shrink from me as you've done ever since you have been here."

"Clare, you know I wanted to be careful for your sake, and Cornie's too."

"You are going to be his best man—how funny—I wonder who is the best man?"

"And Meta your Maid of Honor?"

"Yes. I think she is just a wee bit jealous. She liked Cornie pretty well."

"It makes you feel better to be envied, doesn't it?"

"Every woman likes to feel she has beaten someone in the game of Love," she explained.

"The loser is sometimes the winner," he retorted.

Both ignored their letters and tried to avoid discussing their situation; but as they walked back to the house Clare suddenly said, "I must ask a favor of you, Jean. I want you to give me back my letter! I do not feel safe without it, almost as if it were part of me. I can only breathe easily, be whole again, when I have it in my possession."

Jean put his hand in his inside pocket. "I could not leave

it, had to keep it as close to my heart as possible. I said I could not refuse you anything you asked. Here," he handed the letter to her, "is not only part of you, but of me, too," he added sadly.

She took it and kissed it. "Because it has been near your heart," she explained as she folded it up and put it inside her waist.

"Better be careful you do not lose it. You know the one you wish least of all to find it, is always sure to be the very one who does," was his warning.

"Don't worry, I am not so foolish as to take any chances with it. I will destroy it as soon as I get to my room."

"Why not do so now and be through with it," he advised nervously; "and you better tear up my reply too—or better still—burn them both."

"I must read them over once more before I consign them to the flames," she told him.

"It really isn't wise," he could not resist saying.

"I must go in now. Thank you so much, I feel quite relieved."

"You were afraid to trust me with it," he reproached her.

"No, indeed, I was not," she hastened to say. "Only as I said, I felt as if I had lost something which I had to get back."

"Maybe you have lost something which you can never get back—my full confidence and faith in you," he silently brooded, as they stood for a moment looking into each other's eyes.

"I need your support to go through with this, you will not forget your promise to help me?" she asked softly.

"I said I wouldn't fail you."

She took his hand and held it while she whispered, "I will always be yours;" then she let it fall and ran quickly into the house.

The remainder of the day passed, as had all the days of

the house-party, in a whirl of doings, ending with a marsh-mallow roast on the beach.

As if reserving her action to the very last conscious thought before she would lose herself in slumber, Clare took her letter to Jean and his reply to bed with her, and sitting up in the light of a rose-shaded lamp, re-read her own confession and Jean's renunciation. It was her full intention to destroy them that very night, and to carry out her purpose she had placed on the little table beside her bed a covered silver powder box and some matches, intending to burn the precious words in it.

But when she had completed her perusal of them and lay back on her pillow, she closed her eyes and let her thoughts picture the joys that would have been hers and Jean's in his mountain dwelling, had she been true to her real love. Finally she decided she must prepare for sleep; and sitting up, folded the letters into a very small compact mass and put them in the silver dish. Then she took up a match to light the fire—sacrificial to the god of Love. An unseen hand seemed to restrain her. "No, I can't do it—not to-night, at any rate," she thought. "It is like cutting off a finger—it is as if I were destroying my love for Jean."

She lay back again and considered the matter; "What harm could come if I would lock both of the letters in the lower drawer of my jewel case? I never use that drawer, I couldn't lose them out of it, and no one would ever find them there." She pleaded the case silently with herself.

Suddenly determining what she would do, she arose, went to her dressing table and put the letters in the case; then returned to bed feeling very virtuous. She had locked them away as she had the love they expressed, one enclosed in the case, the other in her heart!

The eventful days preceding a fashionable wedding soon engulfed Clare and Cornie. The latter advocated just running off by themselves and getting married "quietly without

any fuss." The former stubbornly insisted on her bride's right to a regular wedding with all the trimmings, and as usual with brides, had her way in the matter, being heavily supported by her mother.

At last the weeks slipped by and the fateful day arrived. Clare had become a convert to the Catholic religion because Cornie's father wished her to do so, and her own views, as she said, "were very chaotic."

She had been a Methodist because her parents were, and she would be a Catholic because her husband was one. So most women follow the beaten path and have their religion provided for them by their parents or husbands along with the material things of life.

The wedding was to take place in the Bishop's Chapel in the early morning. The Emersons had opened their city house and all was in readiness for the event, which the newspaper heralded as a "union of two wealthy and prominent society people."

## CHAPTER XII

"A WEDDING always makes me cry," declared Meta as she touched a dainty kerchief to her eyes.

"Because it is not your own?" insolently inquired Tillie Freer.

"I think I have had as many offers as you have!" was the heated reply, as Meta fussed to adjust her hat at the proper angle. They were at Clare's home—the wedding party was preparing to leave for the Bishop's Chapel.

"What is the bride wearing that is old?" Tillie asked, changing the subject, as she carefully applied a rouge stick to her lips.

"Some rare lace—it's softened and mellowed—like an old love," responded Meta sentimentally.

"I suppose the 'something new' is the wonderful diamond bar-pin Cornie gave her, bright and sparkling like a new love," Tillie continued the comparison.

There are homes richly furnished which give one solely the impression of wealth; others of good taste and culture as well. The Emerson residence on upper Riverside Drive was in the latter class. The large entrance hall had a wide central stairway leading to a balcony which extended on three sides, giving somewhat the appearance of the cabin of a large steamer. On the walls hung four ancient tapestries depicting heroic tableaux. The colors were faded into soft warm grays and browns, and the figures were shadowy and indistinct. They gave a charm and air of age to the room, accentuated by two tall candle-sticks of wrought iron, and an antique chest and chairs. Around the hall for the occasion were stationed high baskets filled with chrysanthemums, Thanksgiving flowers. From each basket hung wide bands of delicately shaded ribbon.

The large living room, with its heavy pieces of furniture of a past generation, was also brightened by beautiful flowers which filled every nook and corner.

The library and music room, furnished with rare pieces, were likewise bowers of beauty; the dining-room, where the table stood already set for the wedding breakfast, was a mass of color.

The bridal party at last arrived at the chapel. It seemed to Clare that Cornie walked as if on air, his step was so elastic; and that Jean, as best man, walked as if held to the earth by clinging mud, so heavy was his step. She did not know how she walked. She was conscious of people watching her, of her father's appearance, and confident of her own beauty. Meta, following, looked prettier than ever before.

The impressive ceremony through, the bride and groom led the way to the waiting automobiles. There was the never-to-be-forgotten moment when they, who were two, have just been made one—she on his arm—the world before them! What shall they make of it?

It was a radiant bride and a glowing groom who sat at the head of the breakfast table and later met their friends at the afternoon reception and at the dinner dance in the evening.

Jean accompanied them to the hotel where they were to stay until the next morning, when they were to embark for Cherbourg, for a year abroad. It was after eleven when he bade them good-bye; then as they went to their room Clare said to Cornie, "I am going to get everything ready so that we will not have to bother in the morning. The time goes by so quickly."

She took up a Boston bag and started to put some things in it.

"Do you intend to carry that yourself?" Cornie asked. "Why not put everything in the larger cases? I hate hand luggage, it's always a nuisance."

"I never let my jewel case out of my hands, and it is too big for my hand bag, so I have to take this little Boston," she replied.

"Very well." He did not press the matter. "I wonder if you could find room in your precious case for some of my jewelry? I have several pretty valuable stick-pins, this diamond fob, and some cuff-links and studs."

"Of course, give them here."

Cornie handed them to his wife, and she placed them in the top drawer of the case with her own jewelry.

"I always keep it locked," she observed, as she turned the key. She had forgotten for the moment the letters that rested in the lower drawer.

Cornie took up the case, "What an unusual affair! Teakwood, isn't it?"

"Yes. Do you see the wonderful carving? Father bought it in Paris. The same key locks both the case itself and the two inside drawers."

Cornie noticed that Clare bit her lip in vexation as soon as she had said this; suddenly she had remembered the letters in the lower drawer and regretted her uncalled for statement. Watching her hand shake as she put the box in the bag, he wondered why she should have been so upset by the apparently harmless comment.

The next morning, supported by Cornie's arm, Clare climbed up the gang plank into what looked like a hole in the wall of a vertical mountain. Far above, a row of indistinguishable faces peered down on their progress. The steamer, impassive and impressive, received them.

When the puffing little tugs had turned the leviathan around out in the river, Clare knew she was started on a new life. Arm in arm the two stood viewing the sensate Rocky Mountains formed by New York's sky line, and waved good-bye to the Divine Goddess with her hand pointed upward. The ship gathered speed, and it was not long before

all the historic landmarks were passed. Long Island was soon sinking to the north and Sandy Hook fading to the south.

The pilot was finally dropped on a glassy sea, and Clare felt the last touch with her old life was gone. Ambrose and Nantucket lights were passed. America was out of sight! The *Olympic* gathered her skirts and was off, clean-limbed as Atlanta, for the Old World.

Clare had deserted the New Continent of Soul Life for the Old World of Passion!

\* \* \* \* \*

After leaving the newlyweds, Jean went to his room at the Athletic Club and changed to street clothes. He soon came out again as he felt he would choke if he remained inside. The world seemed to have slid from under him. His hopes and ambitions were dead. No jealousy or envy filled him, but a sense of loss that was irreparable—a sinking sensation. He walked and walked, he hardly knew where; repeating to himself, "She is gone—I have lost her!"

Turning into Broadway from Fortieth Street, he was accosted by a young woman, "You look lonely, Friend. Don't want company, do you?" she asked brazenly.

Jean stopped and looked at her. While far from beautiful, she did appear attractive, trim and neat. He hesitated for an instant. He had always disdainfully regarded this kind of chance encounter and brushed by such a seeker.

To-night he did not care. He was sick, heart and soul. His fine and high feelings were buried deep within his being, the brute instinct was uppermost. "What does anything matter? Why should I not amuse myself with this girl? Anything, to forget! To stifle this terrible, lonely feeling," he brooded.

"Yes, I do want company, little one. Where shall we go?" he accepted her advance rather stupidly.

"I would like something to eat—and if you have anything on your hip?" she inquired anxiously.

"Not a thing," he answered. "But how is this place, looks pretty good." He indicated a brightly lighted cafe a few doors from Broadway. It was one of the many restaurants that flourish in the basements of the remodeled houses that line the late Thirties and early Forties, with windows filled with tempting pastries.

"I didn't have any supper," she ventured, after they were seated at a table.

"Better take the table d'hôte, you will get enough to last you until to-morrow night," as he handed her the menu with its long list of selections.

As she studied the card intently, Jean took the opportunity to look her over carefully.

She was really pretty, or rather had been, for she looked wan and peaked in the bright light of the interior. Her short, ashen-blond hair hung in a neat, prim little row of curls all around her head. She wore a tiny tip-tilted bonnet with roses filling in the back, and narrow streamers which fell coquettishly over her left ear. The hat distinctly expressed her type. It fitted her small features, her nose, inclined to be puggish, and her very red lips.

"She is not vulgar," was his conclusion. He could not have tolerated her if she had been.

After giving her order, the girl looked up, studying him as if to read his thoughts.

"You lost something," she pronounced, as her solution of his trouble.

"I have," was all he granted her.

"Money?"

"No," his denial was firm.

"Girl?" cryptically.

"H'm, h'm!" he admitted.

"Wife run away?" Her persistence amused him.

"No; never married," he replied with a smile.

She hesitated, to consider further possibilities.

Her meal arrived. "Aren't you going to eat anything?" She seemed concerned.

"Pastry and coffee," he said carelessly to the waiter. Words would not come to him. He felt dumb and helpless.

"Good soup," his companion asserted, as it fast disappeared.

Presently she renewed her investigation. "Your girl ran away, or married someone else?"

"Married my brother," he told her sadly.

"The hell you say!" She showed her astonishment. "That's a new one! Your brother, eh?" She hoped he would explain—which he did not.

When finally she had finished they left the cafe. She took his arm. "We will go to my room. It is only in the next block—around the corner—two flights up—you won't mind, will you?" she pleaded.

He hesitated just long enough for her to give his arm an almost imperceptible pull, but sufficient to turn the balance in her favor. He let her lead him to her room.

It was barely furnished. He noticed in the dim light that flickered from the single gas jet, a bed, a dresser, one chair, a screen. That was all.

She motioned him to the chair and took off her coat and hat.

He stared at her as if hypnotized. "What a sad little girl!" he thought.

She went behind the screen and came out in a bright red kimona adorned with big yellow flowers. It struck him like a sharp stone. It was the first vulgar, common note, and acted on him like a discord.

He stood up as she came toward him, reached for his hat, and started for the door.

"Wait!" she commanded. "You can't fool me like this!"

He turned back, with a greater disgust than before! "Pardon me, I forgot—" He opened his wallet, picked out a

ten-dollar bill and contemptuously threw it on the dresser and again stepped toward the door.

"I wanted—to help you—forget her," she chose her words carefully, slowly.

Her fervent avowal made no impression on his dulled senses, but as he placed his hand on the knob of the door a baby's cry came from behind the screen! "Ma-ma!" He stopped. The infant's cry seemed to waken him to a realization of where he was, to startle him.

The girl hurried to the child. He turned back and stood waiting. She returned immediately with a baby about two years old in her arms.

"You don't keep him here when—when you bring men?" he asked in horror.

"Where else should I keep him? He doesn't understand, you know."

"But when he—grows older?" he stammered.

"It's awful to think about, isn't it? But what can I do?" she asked piteously, beginning to weep, quietly, without ostentation. She turned her head away from him to hide her shame.

"But why do this? There must be some other way," he insisted.

"I have tried—you don't think I want to do this? I don't think anyone wants to, but it's force of circumstances," she explained.

Clare's words, "It is my Destiny that forces me," came back to him ever so vividly.

As the girl stood in the dim light, with the child in her arms, her face took on a tenderness and a calmness that soothed even Jean's throbbing heart, and pity for them drove out the disgust of a moment before. But he was afraid she would try to tell him her troubles!

"Sometime you can tell me your story—not now—not here," he muttered unevenly. "Would you want to escape from it all?"

"Suicide, or dope? Which is the way you suggest?" she mocked.

"I am in earnest, come with me."

She looked at the child.

"Bring him too. I have a place in the mountains. No one but my old housekeeper and myself."

"That is where you take your women?" she asked dispiritedly.

He shuddered. She couldn't grasp his clean thought. "My lady guests have always been properly chaperoned. You and your child will be safe. How he will thrive in the fresh mountain air!" he enthused.

She caught a little of his spirit. "And how about poor little me?" she questioned.

He took her by the arm. "Poor little mother, we will bring the roses back to your cheeks—and I need you now, too."

"My poor boy," she kissed the babe softly.

It was not the kiss of a wanton, but of a mother. She held the child toward Jean. An electric current seemed to flow between the three, as the baby opened his big black eyes and smiled at him.

"Get your things. I will wait," he ordered as he took the child from her.

She hustled about, taking things out of the drawers, pulling a worn suitcase from beneath the bed, filling and placing it near the door. Then she took a newspaper and wrapped some things in it, putting the bundle on the bed; walked to the dresser, took a sheet of paper and pencil from the upper drawer and went behind the screen. He was staring at the child. In a few moments she crossed again, fully dressed, to the dresser—hesitated—then took the bill he had thrown there and said, "I will be back in a minute. I must pay the landlady." As she left the room she picked up the suitcase unnoticed by Jean.

He played with the child for a time, and then impatiently looked at his watch. Half an hour had passed. He did not know what name to call. He paced the floor for another half-hour. The child had fallen asleep. Finally, he called the landlady.

A voice came up from below: "What d'you want?"

"Where is the girl who rooms up here?"

"How the hell should I know?" she bellowed. "She came here awhile ago and paid me two dollars she owed me. Her week was up to-day, and she said she was leaving. Had her suitcase, too. What'd she do, dump you there?"

"Yes—no—she didn't say when she would be back?"

"Told me she wouldn't be back—what did she do with the kid?"

"He is here—I'll look after him."

"All right, be sure you put the light out when you go!" she yelled as she slammed a door.

He called again.

"What do you want now?" she complained loudly.

"Do you know who she was, anything about her?"

"What d'you think I am, a census taker? Her name was Louise, that's all I know. The third floor roomers never stay long, comin' and goin' all the time. She has been there only three weeks."

"Thank you," Jean replied. He looked at his watch. "It is probably useless to wait longer—but what ought I to do?" he pondered.

Walking over to the bed he looked down at the sleeping child, "You poor helpless mite," he murmured sympathetically.

For the first time he saw the bundle beside the boy, and picking it up, found it to contain his clothing. A note dropped to the floor.

He reached for it and going over to the dim light read:

"*His father's name is Cornie Wildner.*" He stopped as if struck by an unexpected blow.

"My brother—his father! My God, what a coincidence! She didn't know my name. It is a miracle." He glanced toward the child. The eyes and features seemed to be Cornie's, like the old tintype, when they were children together, that they had looked at so often, it was engraved in his memory.

Some shocks—joy, grief, or surprise—deaden the senses and prevent clear thinking; others, from the same causes, sharpen the intellect and make the brain work more quickly and with keener perception. It was the latter effect that Jean felt, as he continued to read the note:

"His father's name is Cornie Wildner. He wouldn't marry me, and I left him before our child was born. He never knew whether it lived or died.

"I don't think he'd care. I wouldn't take his money. Don't take it for my child. I was his plaything, that was all—but I loved him, and I don't complain. Take care of little Cornie. You will never see me again. It is the only way. I would pull him down and you too. Now, no one need ever know his beginning. God bless him, and you too.

"Louise."

"A Love Toy of Cornie's thrown aside when broken and its beauty lost or tired of. And what of the Little Soul Toy thrown into the world—the spark that had blown from the fire of their love—" Jean pondered; "Was the child to be his Soul Toy?"

"Underworld life!" he thought as he looked down at the child. "But that mother has an upper-world soul. She made the supreme sacrifice—her wonder man-child—for his sake. Not even her last name did she leave—sunk without trace. She is gone forever. And Cornie on his wedding trip!

"Do I not owe it to the child to protect it, and to Clare, to keep her from the knowledge of Cornie's unfaithfulness? Yes, and to my father, too? I must take care of Cornie's

child. And most of all, I owe it to the little mother, who put her whole faith in me."

She had read in his eyes the beauty of his soul and had trusted him with her all. He took the child in his arms, picked up the bundle, turned off the light, and went out into the night.

"Where shall I go?" he considered. At his club they would josh him—an unmarried man with a child! His father would not believe his story, and he could hear him say: "Do you expect me to believe this street-walker? Undoubtedly you told her your name and Cornie's."

So he went to a hotel near by and registered, "Jean Wildner and child." He thought of Cornie signing, "Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius M. Wildner, Jr.," on European registers.

He put the child to bed, but sat in an easy chair himself. He felt he could think better, and was not the least bit tired. His attention was attracted to a clock on the wall, with its long pendulum swinging from side to side. It seemed to repeat over and over, "Something old—something new; something lost—something gained." "Yes," he contemplated its meaning, "my old hopes and ambitions are gone, but here is a new incentive to live; through this little child, my soul's desire may be regenerated and rise like a Phoenix from the flames. Something lost—my Clare; something gained—Cornie's child! Fate surely plays strange jokes!"

Morning came at last, and after breakfasting, Jean left for "Soul's Desire." The boy clung to him with his little hands, but it seemed to Jean as if he were the one who was actually being led back to the peace of his mountains.

## CHAPTER XIII

As JEAN opened the door to "Soul's Desire," Mary came to meet him. She stopped in open-eyed amazement as she saw the little child.

"Wherever did you find him?" she asked.

"I am going to adopt him." He gave the decision he had suddenly reached. "You will have to look after him, Mary, as you did me."

"That I will, Mr. Jean; but you are so young—only twenty-five—and no wife—and a child—Oh, my! What people do these days! Nothing surprises me any more!" she wailed.

"We will love him, Mary, and he is going to love us. Sonny, aren't you?" He patted the curly head.

The child looked up and smiled at them.

"What's his name?" Mary asked.

"Cor—" he started to say, and then hesitated: "Adam is his name." It was the first that came to him.

"A sensible one," the woman affirmed; "I always liked Bible names."

"He is going to be the first of his race—a soul child. Through him, my soul desires shall reach fulfillment. A modern Adam with the heritage of all Man's desires since his first namesake!" Jean meditated.

It was about ten days later that he received a letter from Clare, plain and sister-like. He replied in kind, telling her of the little child that he had taken to live with him and expected to adopt.

She told him in return that she did not like the name Adam. "It was too old-fashioned, and pity to give a child such an encumbrance." She advised him to call the boy

Keats, after the poet, the high-priest of Beauty, and let him be their soul child—their soul flower! She demanded to be his foster-mother, but only if he was named Keats.

And so, Adam became Keats, flourished like a weed in the crisp mountain air, and became a great pal of Jean.

It was part of Mary's duty to keep Mr. Wildner advised of any unusual development in his son's household. So in due course the former came to know of the addition thereto and surprised Jean one day with a visit.

"Where did you get the child?" he inquired brusquely.

"A little waif whom I heard about, and who conquered me completely when I saw him," Jean declared.

"Humph! risky business to take a child off the streets; never know what inherited criminal or base instincts he may have."

"I believe, with proper environment and education, a child will develop his own qualities," asserted Jean.

"Impossible to make Nature over," his father said assuredly.

"I am going to try, anyway."

"You will have your hands full. Silly thing for a young fellow to handicap himself. Better put him in a good home somewhere. I wanted to suggest that you devote a little more of your time to me."

Little Keats came over to the old gentleman and climbed on his lap, smiling up into his face. No human with a bit of the milk of understanding within him, could withstand the hungry appeal of such a child.

"He isn't a bad-looking boy," Mr. Wildner admitted, half-willingly.

Jean stole away, and when he returned sometime later his father was on his hands and knees playing horse with the little fellow. This was the beginning of a strange companionship. "His real grandson," Jean thought, "seems to understand him." He was quiet when the elder's mood so

required and lively when that answered his feelings. And thereafter Mr. Wildner called on his son with much greater frequency than had been his custom.

One day the three were seated on the porch of "Soul's Desire," when the elder Wildner said, "I must go into town and tend to some business. My will—going to make some changes; take care of this little rascal," as he pinched the boy's cheek, "and fix you up Jean, too. I used to think you were a peculiar outcast, but I have grown to know you better since you adopted this little fellow. I have increased your allowance."

"Thanks, Dad; I have to do some figuring to keep even. You know I practically support that social center on the East Side that I started."

"You get no thanks for it either—don't believe in those things. I had to work for what I have. Let the rest do it, too."

"But if you could see the tired mothers who call for their babies, like Keats, after working all day, you would see that you couldn't stop. And then the boy scouts who enjoy the gymnasium equipment with which I fitted up the place, and the food for the school children! There is so much to do."

"That is why I give liberally to the associated charities. It is their business, let them tend to it."

Jean recalled what one worker had said of his father: "He gives to everything, but does it grudgingly. He always asks what someone else in like circumstances has given, and then gives the same; never freely, or what may be needed. He simply does not let the other fellow get ahead of him, that is all."

It was only a few months later that Mr. Wildner, Sr., suffered a stroke of paralysis. Jean watched over him, moving into the city house with Mary and Keats.

Cornie wrote asking if he should return, but Jean told him not to do so. He felt that he wanted to keep off the day of his return with Clare as long as possible.

Six months after Cornie's marriage, and while he was still in Europe, his father passed away. The end came with an abruptness that surprised Jean and left him with a sense of loss that he had never expected to feel.

Cornie and Clare had not come back. He agreed with them that it would be foolish to give up the remainder of their wedding trip. They were in Paris at the time, and Clare had written that they expected to remain there for sometime.

The only member of Jean's family who could comfort him during the trying days was his Aunt Mary, his father's sister, who had become a nun and risen in her order to a Mother Superior. As Mother Justine, she was in charge of St. Mary's Academy in Yonkers. Jean had always stood in awe of this tall, stout lady with the pale, calm face and black garb. His father used to relate how, at his grandfather's funeral, when Jean was a tiny lad, someone asked him who the lady in the black cap and gown was, and he answered: "God!" To him, she represented the personality of the Deity, and he never outgrew that feeling.

To Mother Justine he turned in his grief, and it was she who comforted him. Of an executive type, but with a motherly, kind soul, she always had an open ear for worldly troubles and offered sound advice as well as spiritual consolation.

"Come to me with your problems, my dear," she said. "It pains me that you have not been a good church member, but you are young yet and I have not given up hope of bringing you back. You are really the spiritual head of your family, with your beautiful soul ideals, but I wish you could see your way to reaching them through our beloved Church."

"It grieves me to hurt you, Aunt Mary," Jean always called her that, "but would it not be wrong to do lip service merely, when one feels he must throw off the shackles of form and ritual? But you will not desert me now!" he pleaded.

"I want to be your haven of rest, my child, and to teach you that the things you call shackles, are really wings to carry you to the heights. Come to me at any time, my dear."

Jean left her, as he always did, with a feeling of comfort.

He thought to himself, that when he received the half of his father's estate that he had no doubt would be his, he would assist his aunt in her great work of helping others with as much of his means as he could give.

Back to the old home he went, awaiting word from his father's lawyers as to the contents of the will.

Death gives a new perspective to Life. Following its visit, the things that one has been accustomed to doing seem belittled and senseless; and it is not until Time, in its usual course, closes Memory's door, that again daily tasks are taken up in the former spirit.

The day following the funeral Jean received a telephone call from Mr. Shaw, the family counsellor, who told him that he had his father's will, and that he would be glad to call either at the home or have Jean and his aunt come to the office. Jean told him to come to the house that afternoon, and then called Mother Justine and asked her to be present.

At the hour agreed the lawyer appeared at the Wildner home. After greeting Jean and his aunt and offering his sympathy, he took a paper from his portfolio. "I have here Mr. Wildner's will," he began. "I will not bore you with its legal phraseology but will just tell you its terms."

Mother Justine and her nephew nodded their approval.

Carefully adjusting his glasses, the lawyer glanced down at the document and said; "He leaves a trust fund of a hundred thousand dollars, the income to be paid to you, Jean. At the age of fifty, you can draw twenty thousand and a like sum every tenth year thereafter until you have received the whole."

Jean gasped. He computed rapidly in his mind the income that this fund would bring. At six per cent, it would

net six thousand dollars a year—five hundred per month, just the amount of the allowance his father had been giving him, and with which he barely managed to get along. "This can not be all that my father has left me!" he thought. "What is a hundred thousand out of millions?" His forehead bore a puzzled wrinkle.

"He says," the lawyer continued, "that he creates this fund for your own good and because he realizes your talents do not run in a commercial line. He wishes you to understand that he is trying to put you in an independent financial position, which he fears would not be your situation for long if he gave you money outright."

"What do you think of that?" Jean asked his aunt. "I'll be ninety years old when I get the last of the hundred thousand!"

"A most unusual provision, is it not, Mr. Shaw?" the Mother inquired.

"Yes, indeed, very unusual. In fact, I advised against it. But Mr. Wildner was quite set in his opinions, Madam. He gave me to understand that he did not underestimate his son's abilities nor his fine feelings, but he did not propose to have his hard-earned money 'scattered to the four winds for foolish things' as he termed Jean's rather ideal plans."

"Go on, let us hear the rest," Jean demanded curtly. An invisible barrier seemed to stand between the father he had come to know so well during his illness, and the man whose will was being read.

"There is a legacy of fifty thousand to you," turning to the Nun, "and all the rest and residue goes to Cornie."

Jean's head suddenly fell to his hands. He sat as if in a stupor. His fine fibre shrank from admitting the injustice of his own father.

The Mother crossed to him and patted his head. "There must be some mistake," she declared. "I am sure Cornelius never intended to make such an unequal distribution of his property."

"There is no explanation of the way people make their wills," was the weary answer of the attorney.

"It's funny, really funny," Jean muttered; "ninety years; can you imagine such a thing? I have got to be ninety years old before I get all of that trivial trust fund. I really feel like laughing."

"It's a cruel joke," the Mother said with deep feeling.

"It's simply ridiculous, I can not believe it," Jean continued. "He promised to take care of little Keats, too. I had so many plans. I am sure I don't know what to say," he ended bewilderedly.

"When was this will made?" the Nun asked.

"Six months ago, just before Cornie was married," was Shaw's reply.

"Father spoke of changing his will a short time ago," Jean said listlessly.

"It that so?" The lawyer was interested. "He didn't do it, however. So many men wait until it is too late."

"Could the will be broken?" the Mother asked with her usual business sense.

"Well of course one always can contest, because of insanity or undue influence, or both, but there is a clause in this will, I don't believe I mentioned it before, that whoever contests is to receive nothing. So you see, Jean would be taking quite a chance."

"My father left 'Soul's Desire' a few weeks ago, stating that he had to attend to some changes in his will."

"I have looked after your father's legal business for many years and he has not discussed the will question with me since he made this," said Shaw, indicating the document which he held.

"He might have gone to some other lawyers," Mother Justine suggested.

"Very improbable indeed," was Mr. Shaw's stiff answer.

After the lawyer had gone, Mother Justine told Jean that

she thought he ought to make an effort to discover if another will had been made.

"But how, Aunt Mary?" he asked.

"Have you a pencil?" she inquired.

Jean handed her one and she went to a desk and wrote, "Will lawyer who drew a will or codicil for Cornelius M. Wildner within a few weeks past, please communicate with Box No.—."

"Telephone this to the *Times* and get a box number," she said, handing him the advertisement.

During the following days, Jean conferred repeatedly with his aunt, with the Rabbi and Enoch Glynn.

"It isn't the money," he told them. "I can get along as I have been doing, but it's the fact that the provision brands me a failure, that hurts. My father felt I was incompetent to handle money. And the more I think about it, the more I feel he was right."

"You are so unselfish, your father could not understand you. Money has always been to you merely a means necessary to obtain your splendid aims," the Rabbi explained.

"I feel my whole life crumbling before me. Am I wrong? I believe the world would agree with my father."

"The World is not a fair judge," the Mother told him. "A Higher Power would not approve your father's deed. The World does not always appreciate the aspirations and the pangs of the human heart."

"I'd fight to the bitter end," Glynn advised. "No jury in the world would ever uphold such a preposterous clause."

"What of your Science doctrine of peace and happiness? How do you advise bitterness and strife?" questioned the Rabbi.

"Even the Science Church authorities have resorted to the courts to straighten out their internal difficulties." Glynn cited that case as if it absolutely settled the matter.

"And what do you think, Rabbi?" interrogated Jean.

"It is a matter for you alone to decide. 'Honor thy father and thy mother' is a positive commandment, and I believe applies to their memory. I would hesitate to advise anyone not to follow its behest."

"But if his father has been unduly influenced, would it not be Jean's duty to try to find out his real wishes and follow them?" Glynn insisted.

"I could never drag my father's memory in the dust, or make my self-respect a morsel for public consumption," Jean declared. "I have made up my mind. I have heard nothing from the advertisement. Apparently the will was not changed. I will not fight. Let Cornie keep it all if he wants to. I would feel so degraded in attacking my dead father that all the money in the world could never rehabilitate me in my own estimation."

"You have made a good decision," Mother Justine agreed, when Jean communicated his conclusion to her. "Our family honor must be maintained."

Clare wrote Jean of her surprise at the terms of the will, and in her letters he sensed a feeling of discontent. "I wonder," he would say to himself, "if Clare is happy? I wonder?"

He kept busy with his social service and settlement work but would brood for long hours over his soul desires. His spirit was across the seas; and it was only while with Keats that he could at all envisage his future. He felt he could not reach the top, but perhaps Keats would succeed in so doing.

He left "Soul's Desire" less and less and became more and more depressed and lonely. He felt hand-tied, he could not accomplish what he wished; foot-tied, he was unhappy everywhere but in his mountains—and purse-tied as well.

His aunt tried to turn his thoughts to the Church, but he felt he could only breathe in the free air of his mountains and could not be brought back.

"Should I not be satisfied?" Jean asked himself. "I have

Keats, for whom I can plan, enough to live on, and plenty to do and think about. But how can I strive to attain my soul's desire, which seems more and more to mean Clare? With her I could reach the heights. Perhaps the turning of the Wheels of Fate may some day bring Clare to me, but how? I will not covet my brother's wife!"

Somehow, as he lay in the twilight on the little ledge of rock that so often supported him, the glories of the mountain lights in the blending of day into night seemed to overcome him, and he concluded, "Nothing is impossible when such grandeur of Nature can exist and be always the same, yet constantly changing. My life is not ended, it is just beginning." He determined: "I will be content, I will trust in God, and I will yet triumph! I will completely release my soul and in the newer consciousness—a super-consciousness—I will control my existence!" The leaves rustling in the cool fresh breezes of early June seemed a fit musical accompaniment to his meditation and soothed his troubled thoughts, as he commandeered the utmost resources of his being to aid him in obtaining peace of mind, of heart, of soul.



PART V  
SEAS OF PLEASURE —



## CHAPTER XIV

THE ROLLS ROYCE which Cornie had ordered by cable was at the Cherbourg dock upon his arrival with his bride and they drove directly to Paris. The Hotel Continental became their headquarters and there they always returned from their travels.

Cornie had many friends in the French capital and was his happiest when introducing Clare as his wife. His pet phrase was, "Gentlemen, my wife!" He selected all her gowns, suits, and capes, going with her to the various fashionable establishments. She was his doll, dressed to express his views of the way a woman ought to look. She often rebelled at this assumption of one of her greatest pleasures, but had to admit that he displayed remarkable taste and conceived the most bizarre ideas. No native Parisienne was more properly garbed or in better style.

Charity is the reason, or excuse, for many large balls. Everything was for Charity during their first season abroad. They attended four wonderful balls in the *Theatre Des Champs Elysees* for the City of Rheims; the Black and White Ball, (*Noir et Blanc*); The Ball of the Setting Sun (*Couchant de Soleil*); the Moonlight Ball (*Clair de Lune*); and the Rainbow Ball (*Arc-en-cie*); but the most astonishing of all was the Four Arts Ball (*des Quat'z' Arts*), the annual frolic of Parisian Bohemia. They are standing on a balcony overlooking the grand march.

"Talk about Roman feasts, Grecian follies or Carthaginian revels; this has them all beaten to a frazzle!" Cornie declares.

"Look at Eve—with her fig leaf! But my, there is one without any leaf!" Clare gasps as she points out the figures below.

"Hot stuff, I'll say!" Cornie approves.

Graceful dryads, dainty nymphs and fawns in sparse diaphanous draperies; a fascinating Trilby; maids in crimson and rainbow bathing tights, fairies and ballet dancers were mingling with nude priestesses of love! The latest sartorial stunt, lines stenciled on the skin, supplemented the briefest gowns. Gay troubadours, Egyptians, Arabs, Cannibals, Indians and whirling Dervishes in costumes almost Adam-like, were escorting them. Bronze half nude women accompanied cave-men wearing single bear hides!

"It's a reversion to savagery!" Clare declares, while she looks down at her own harem costume. Cornie had insisted that she wear it and she had feared it would be noticeable because of its revealing character. Now its modesty surprised her.

"Shade of Anthony Comstock! So this is Paris!" Cornie chuckles. He was in his glory.

The ball-room was decorated after the manner of a Hindoo temple, with hundreds of vari-colored lanterns; and a group of dancing girls led the parade of floats from the leading *ateliers*.

"Look at the elephant!" Clare cries as a huge papier mache pachyderm passes; but Cornie isn't looking at it, but at the beautiful young model seated on its high back posing as Lady Godiva—except for the fact that her hair was bobbed! Ten young women, elephant tamers, accompany the huge imitation animal. On another float, thirteen gracefully formed models are prostrate before an art student representing Buddha.

With the disappearance from view of the many fantastic floats, the dancing starts. The couples do not move about much but seem stationary wiggling matches, the bodies keeping time with the wild, weird music. Cornie was representing an Arabian Shiek; and Clare watching him making love to Cleopatra, the Queen of Sheba, and a dozen other

celebrities, feels she is really only one of his harem, for he seems able to make every woman he meets, part of it. Throwing herself into the riotous gayety with a reckless abandon, when the unmasking finally comes she finds herself surrounded by a group of admirers, delighted to find that her face is not a disappointment to them.

“Ah! Madam, there is nothing like this *en Amerique!* I have been there!” a Powder Puff maid boasts. “You lack the *verve*—the *flair* for beauty that *La Belle France* alone has!”

“I know one thing,” Clare replies, “there is only one place that is hotter than this room—and that isn’t a Turkish bath either!”

“The prevailing costumes seem to have been designed for the place you have in mind,” a gentleman answers.

The saturnalian orgy is spreading from the ballroom to the cafe, where champagne flows like water, and to other nearby cafes, as the gay throng overflows to them.

With the advancing hours the bluish light of the dawning day mixing with the electric brilliance diffuses a weird glow on the flesh tones of the thousands of dancers. Suddenly order seems to take hold of the throng and a huge circle forms, the front row sitting on the floor, the second squatting; the third on chairs; the fourth standing, and the fifth elevated on tops of chairs and tables—so that all can view the wild impromptu solo dancing of the stars of the Follies and cabarets, the usual early morning attraction.

“What a dream!” Cornie murmurs as a famous beauty, her black bobbed hair bound in a golden fillet, with a circle wrought in silver and studded with turquoises clasping her superb torso, throws her sandals to the crowd and begins a strange Oriental dance. As her supple, wonderfully formed body sways to and fro with an airy grace to the exotic rhythm, she tears her jeweled costume from her body bit by bit and tosses the brilliants to the most vociferous of her admirers.

A great cry of delight, "*Vive longue les Quatz' Arts!*" arises from a thousand voices as the dancer hurls herself into the arms of her escort.

"Don't you think we'd better be going?" The time of Clare's question is several hours later. "We've been hitting quite a pace since ten thirty—was it last night? I feel as if I had been here several nights!"

"It's only seven now! Be game, Clare! I am going to see it through. They say the grand finale is going to be the best of all!" He continued with a tipsy enthusiasm: "I never miss anything! Wouldn't go home now for the world!" He grasps a post for support. "Take you home if you want and come back myself, what say?"

"No sir-ee, I should say not!" Clare's answer was positive. "You can't get rid of me as easy as that. I'll stick to the end, if you have to carry me out!"

At eleven, in the midst of a wild jamboree, the dancing ceases and a procession of happy and tipsy revelers soon forms. Cornie calls to Clare: "Come on, old gal, we'll join the par-ade. This'll beat Barnum and Bailey's greatest!"

Around the ball-room, out of the building and down the Avenue it continues. Some are marching; some are dancing; while others are jogging along astride the backs of cab horses. Heads and legs are thrust indiscriminately out of overfilled cabs and taxis. Atop the vehicles are more boisterous passengers. Cornie helps Clare into a cab and as others pile in, draws himself on top of the horse's back. As the mob proceeds with wild shouts, ribald songs and yells, Cornie sights a slip of a girl who is separated from her escort. With a quick jump he dismounts. Rushing to where she stands, he grabs her about the waist, carries her to the horse, lifts her on and pulls himself up after her. Laughing and waving, the fantastic procession passes down from *Le Moulin Rouge!*

At the great open court of the *Louvre* it halts. A general romp ensues. All are pulled into snake dances, quadrilles,

and circles. Kissing and hugging are the order of the hour. A game of leap frog starts. Here a nude nymph is taking a ride on a cavalier's back as he cavorts about on all fours. There a dainty fairy is being raised high on her escort's shoulders. Someone calls, "*En Avance!*!" The horseplay ends as suddenly as it began. Again they are on their way!

Over the *Pont du Carrousel*, and on they go until the *Odeon* is reached, where in wild disorder the disbanding takes place. "*La fin des Quat'z' Arts!*" is the general lament as the gay animals seek their lairs or proceed to the cafes to continue their pleasure.

Visits to the theatres and trips to the various dancing places became part of their daily program. Jazz bands were still the rage—only Hungarians replaces negroes as players.

While he enjoyed showing off his beautiful wife, there were many times when Cornie would suddenly announce to her, "I've a date for to-night. Enjoy yourself while I am gone." He did not care what she did in his absence, but insisted that she be ready to receive him whether he returned—early or late—drunk or sober. Frequently he would take her away from dinner parties or in the midst of a ball on some trumped up excuse after she had spent hours in preparation for the affair, and lead her back to their apartment. He made her his Love Toy and amused himself with her as he would with a woman of the streets! Supplying her every want, anticipating her least desire, he felt he paid her well.

"I am a wife in name only," she would frequently brood bitterly, "a slave in reality."

"You do not allow me to plan for myself, to decide on anything except these jewels and baubles," she complained on one occasion when he was mellow with wine. Sleep, rest, her toilet, her gowns, her own engagements were all subject to his whim and caprice. She could not call a moment of the day or night her own, privacy was unknown to her,

“Gentlemen, my wife!” Cornie used his customary introduction to a group of his friends at the *Café Le Moulin Rouge* where he had taken Clare to conclude an evening’s entertainment.

“Some beauty! Such a face! Such a figure! What a gown, and jewels!” were the comments Clare heard about her

When she was thus the cynosure of all eyes, she would forget the indignities her husband heaped upon her. She loved the gayety, the music, the laughter, the life of the cafes.

“There is Mrs. Cornelius Wildner!” she heard repeatedly as they made their way through the crowded room to a prominent table.

“Can we come over?” a number of the gayest in the room appealed by sign and note to Clare and Cornie for permission to join them.

Merrily they waved their consent and invitation. They were monarchs of the Domain of Pleasure. The adulation of those about her was food to Clare’s vanity—the daring conversation was champagne to her brain.

“This is the life!” she said to Cornie, as she sailed out on to the dance floor in his arms and was immediately aware of the excitement she created. Her face was expressive of the utmost happiness and satisfaction as men crowded about her begging a dance.

“I have sold the Rolls Royce,” Cornie announced to Clare one morning after they had been abroad for several months. “I’ve bought a Daimler—eighty horse power!”

“Why the sudden change?”

“I met Julia Seater yesterday, remember her? She used to be a pal of mine. She married the Duke de Bourane,” Cornie told her.

“Oh yes. I went to Vassar with her. If my recollection is correct, the Duke was a handsome fellow,” Clare replied.

"But what have they to do with your new car?"

"They are on their way to Cannes, and it occurred to me that it would be very pleasant to motor from here with them. We'll go on to 'Monte.' I am just itching to get at the tables there. We can while away a pleasant month or two. They have accepted my invitation."

"You might at least have asked *me* before you invited your other guests!" Clare blazed.

Cornie only shrugged his shoulders.

"When do you propose to leave," she asked sharply.

"How does the beginning of next week suit you?"

"As well as any other time, I suppose."

During the following days until the time of their departure, the Duke and his wife were the constant companions of the Wildners.

"The Duchess Julia," Cornie called her much to her annoyance and his own amusement. Her newly-found aristocratic manner and stately bearing were the target for his humorous shots. He enjoyed reminding her of their past escapades and kept saying, "I knew her when—" leaving the rest to the imagination of his hearers.

The Duke held Clare's interest by his democratic and almost bold comradeship. He was untouched by the flattery that the enviable position which he held in French society brought him, and was a good fellow in every sense of the term.

Whenever the two couples would start away from the hotel together, Cornie would call out, "Exchange partners!" as he took the arm of the Duchess and shoved her husband to Clare.

"I'll sit in front with the chauffeur," Cornie said as they started on their motor trip, "because I want to drive a little later."

The Duke sat between Clare and his wife. "It's all right with me," he replied. "I'll protect the ladies," as he swung an arm about each.

Cornie turned with a grin: "Go as far as you like. I knew them both long before they ever heard about you."

The car shot out the *Porte Maillot*, and after making various turns finally struck the long steady ascent leading to Versailles. At the *Petit Trianon* all left the car and strolled about the beautiful park, admiring the fountains and the palace with its graceful buildings.

Clare remarked softly to the Duke, "How wonderful it would have been to attend the marvelous fetes that took place here."

"I can picture you on the arm of the king," he replied.

"And I can see myself running away from him to hold a secret tryst with you behind that group of statuary."

"If we could only project ourselves backward a few centuries!" was his wistful thought.

"Come hither!" Cornie called. "We've got to get along." He took the wheel as the others stepped into the car and soon had them speeding through the undulating country. Wide vistas of well-tilled fields and rambling old moss-covered farm houses opened up to their view. Occasionally great masses of dark green woodland greeted them, with picturesque châteaux towering above.

"What place is this?" Clare asked as they came into a city.

"Orleans," the Duke answered. "We are on the *Route Nationale* now."

A view of the three bridges spanning the River Loire and the twin towers of the old cathedral lay before them. Following the River they passed through the city and out into the country by many vine-yards and gardens, which bordered the banks. They watched the washerwomen beating and thudding their clothes on the boards as the bluish soap-suds poured off into the stream. One gray quiet village after another was put behind them until Blois was reached.

Dinner was had in a curious old inn, the *Hôtel de l'Angleterre*, on the quay by the ancient stone bridge which has a

pointed obelisk at its apex. The long low dining-room looked out across the black river, and as Clare gazed into the night her thoughts became mystic and haunting. "What is Jean doing now? Does he miss me? Why is it that I am lonely, even in the company of this entertaining nobleman?"

"A penny for your thoughts," said the Duke breaking her reverie.

"Where did you learn that Americanism?" was her answer.

"Now don't evade my offer," he returned.

"I was thinking of home," she said sadly.

Cornie caught her reply and with a queer grimace turned to her. "Home? Where have I heard the word before? Oh yes, that's the club-house where the members of a modern family meet occasionally at meals and comment on the state of their respective healths, and sometimes acquaint each other with proposed plans for the future—then depart for more exciting company."

"Our Cornie has become quite cynical," the Duchess said with a smile.

"Home!" Cornie continued, "the place where the dough comes from that we bake into sweet cakes elsewhere."

"Another glass of this Benedictine and we will be hearing him spout poetry," the Duke said with a laugh.

In their rooms they found heavily curtained beds with icy-cold sheets and immense feather mattresses. A little stand with a white marble top on which stood the inevitable glass tray with a bottle of rum, water and sugar for a final night-cap, adorned each room.

The next morning the party continued on past castles, châteaux, and cathedrals galore to Tours. They were dazzled by sudden riots of color appearing before them—scarlet poppies and blue cornflowers in a setting of bright green—like impressionist paintings.

"This is the country of Balzac and Rabelais," the Duke told them. "Let's stay here until to-morrow."

"I am satisfied," Cornie agreed. "I think the *Hôtel de l'Univers* is the best place here. We'll try it at any rate."

Late in the evening as they sat about a table in the outdoor cafe of the hotel, Cornie announced solemnly, "I give due warning that if anyone attempts to drag me to see another château, he is going to lose his head! I've seen enough châteaux around this neck of the woods to last me for the rest of my days—and then some."

"You poor boy," the Duchess consoled him, "you take your art like your liquor, in big doses, don't you?"

They were on a tree-shaded island in the middle of the road close to a statue of Balzac. From the cafe opposite came the sensuous appeal of the old love refrain: *O sole mio*. It was the voice of the red-coated leader of the orchestra. He stood just outside the doorway with his baton in his hand and throwing out his arms with thrilling gestures.

"Now that is what I call real music!" Cornie declared as he applauded.

"Can't you feel the Romance in the air?" the Duke whispered to Clare. The singer was repeating the song, and the night seemed to catch its breath as it listened, hushed and expectant. Clare nodded to the Duke. He drew her hand to his lap and pressed it vehemently. She did not remove it from his grasp.

Again on their way, Touraine was soon in their rear and the first stage of the long run southward was begun over highways bounded by seas of billowy waving grain, and edged with tall poplars.

Late in the night the lights of Poitiers appeared and the sleepy *douanier* welcomed them to the city and directed them to the *Hôtel Gaillard*.

Early the next morning they proceeded to Bordeaux. The car had to be slowed down time and again for large flocks of geese that pre-empted the road, each guarded by a little gooseherd.

"Watch me burn up the road!" Cornie told the rest of the party as he took the wheel on a level stretch.

A medley of towers, turrets, masts and sails, beautifully grouped, came into view as they crossed the bridge into the city.

"The *Restaurant du Chapon Fin* serves the finest wine in town," the Duke volunteered.

"That's where we will have our *déjeuner*," said Cornie.

The waiter officiated at the shrine of Bacchus with great preparation and solicitude and carefully decanted the precious wine.

"We must stop and see old man Sauterne in his native haunt," Cornie said as they set off for the town of Sauternes.

"Our dear old dinner companion," Clare added.

A vast pine forest engulfed them after they left the old village and the chauffeur put on more speed in the silent stretches.

"Dax is our next resting place," Cornie told the others, "but not for long." However, when he saw the magnificent Casino and the attractive promenade with its gayly dressed ladies, he exclaimed, "We can stand this place for a few days, I'll say."

After dinner the Duchess complained of a headache, and retired. Cornie went to the Casino to "try my luck," he said, and Clare and the Duke were left alone. They finally found a secluded bench on the wide terrace. The moonlight gave the trees, the flowers, the people, all an unreal appearance, and the big Casino behind seemed a fairy palace that would fade away in the daylight.

The Duke sighed. Clare looked at him. He too seemed unreal.

"If you were only my wife—" he breathed softly.

"I suppose you'd be a king or an emperor," Clare retorted.

"The Lord only knows what heights I would reach—"

"Surely the Duchess is ambitious."

"I need a greater incentive than ambition."

The mystic spirit of the night seemed to seize Clare. She felt a wild desire to lead this smiling, handsome man along. With a devil-may-care manner she said: "Would I make a good queen or better, the Empress Clare?"

"I don't know how good you'd be—but a beautiful ruler you surely would be."

"Well, the king business isn't what it used to be, you know; and how would you support your consort?"

"Why refer to such prosaic things? I only know I love you!" He put out his arms to draw her to him. "What else matters than love?"

She pushed him away. "Please! Don't penalize me for flirting a bit."

"Your husband doesn't hesitate because of you. 'What's sauce for the goose'; you know the rest."

"But if the marriage candle is burned at both ends, it can't last very long."

"But do you want it to last? I know you are not happy."

"Happiness? What is it? I am sure I don't know whether or not I am happy! If it is merely contentment, sometimes I am really happy in possessing everything I have ever longed to have."

"Everything?"

"No. You are right. I haven't my husband's love or respect—anyone can see that—it is no secret."

The Duke nodded. "And he hasn't yours either. Well, I am in the same boat. They say misery loves company." He looked at her expectantly.

Clare laughed as she gave the Duke her hand. "You are what we call a good sport."

"Was it money caught you, too?" he asked.

"Not exactly—but what does it matter? We both sold ourselves. Now we must make the best of the bargain."

"Do you care for me?" her companion asked earnestly.

“No!” the answer came quickly. “I am frank with you. I enjoy your company—” She looked down. “There is someone else.”

“Across the sea?”

Clare nodded.

“Please believe me when I tell you that I really do love you! Don’t you think you could be happy with me?”

She shook her head. “I am loyal—up to the present at any rate.” Putting out her hand, she said, “Let us be friends. We need each other.”

“A common trouble,” he laughed, “too-much-married-it is!”

“Rather too little,” was her reply.

Back at the hotel, Cornie informed them that they would not stop at Bayonne but go right through to Biarritz. The Duchess reveled in the brilliant scenes at the latter place. “The terrace here is as alive with color and light and as active as the boulevards of Paris,” she commented, “in fact it is a delightful *P’tit Paris*.”

“You would be satisfied with me anywhere, wouldn’t you, Duchie dear?” Cornie ventured to say with a knowing smirk.

“It is certainly a relief to be with someone who understands me,” she replied woefully. “The Duke is such a bore—he is a nonentity—you are a real man.”

“It does you good to come off your high horse once in a while,” he said. “I am the irresistible Cornie! Duchesses fall for me like all the rest.”

At Pau they stopped for a glorious view of the Pyrenees, and then went on to Marseilles.

“It seems like coming into New York after a summer on Long Island,” Cornie declared as they drew into the busy streets, “but we’ll push right on to Aix-en-Provence for the night—I think we will like it better.”

The picturesque *Gorges des Ollioules* presented themselves on the following day as they wound their way under the shadow of lofty piles of rock shining gray, green, and yellow

in the sunlight and between cliff-like walls, until at last Toulon was reached.

"Hail the *Boulevard de Strassbourg!*" the Duke cried as a burst of jazz assailed their ears.

"Now for the dance," Clare exulted. "*J'adore la danse.*"

"Sailors everywhere," the Duchess remarked.

"There may be an admiral about for your Highness," Cornie predicted. "We will stay here until to-morrow, and then go on to Hyères."

Seated on the terrace in the shade of some massive palms, Cornie put his arm about the titled lady. "You've a little kiss for Cornie?" he begged. His companion pressed a cold salute on his lips. "There! No one can say I am not game," she whispered.

"You are almost human," Cornie answered.

The Carleton Hotel at Cannes was the destination of the Bouranes.

"Why stop here?" Clare asked as they reached it.

"*Cannes est le pays où 'on jouit de la vie,*" the Duke replied.

As Clare parted from him she could not resist saying, "You have been such a comfort. I don't know how things will go with us."

"Try to be true to yourself," was all he replied.

"Be good, Ducie dear," Cornie called as the car again pointed eastward. The harbor dotted with pink and blue fishing boats, their sails patched with orange and brown, lay before them.

"This is what the French call the *Côte d'Azur,*" Cornie explained as the car followed the long curve of the sea along the coast, past silvery olive orchards on the hillsides, and roses abounding in the gay gardens.

At Nice they rested for several days enjoying its sunshine, its gaiety, movement, and general cheerful atmosphere, and Clare shopped along the *Avenue de la Gare* before

they began the steady ascent of the Grand Corniche. Below, the city unfolded itself to their sight, the hills and the sea growing more beautiful with each loop about the heights. Higher and higher they continued in spirals between walled gardens—the mountains above drawing nearer as the sea grew further below. In and out the road winds with ever-changing views—now great red rocks extend down sheer into the depths of the Mediterranean—again, a cliff comes between the road and the water, with a village perched high upon its very crown, as if to prove that man can lord it over both sea and shore. The ancient castle seems to look down on it all.

Clare said to her husband, "I feel as if we were on top of the Equitable Building rushing around the roof close to the edge without any railing!"

"Makes you feel you're kind of up in the world, eh?" he flung back.

"What would you call that blue of the Mediterranean way down there?" she questioned, leaning from the car.

"Indigo or turquoise—some shade! Say that red-roofed villa up there looks like it was stuck there with mucilage."

Clare laughed: "It all seems so unreal; everything is exaggerated!"

"Ain't Nature grand?" Cornie yelled as the wind carried his voice away.

"Oh, how can you—this is the real thing! Just see how we seem to be flying in the air; everything is either far below or far above, we are midway between heaven and earth."

"Some Midway, this way for the big show—Monte Carlo!"

"At the end of the rainbow—a pot of gold!" she finished.

"Or of cold porridge!" Cornie corrected.

"Color and light—height and depth—water below—mountains above." Clare continued to interpret the scene as they drove along the smooth highway until they finally reached their destination.

## CHAPTER XV

MONTE CARLO—the dreamland—a jeweled goblet which the World fills from a proffered cob-webbed bottle with the Wine of Life, sparkling with excitement, adventure, sport; bubbling with hysteria, greed, passion! This strangely different intoxicant with its delicate bouquet of love, beauty, music, and its cosmopolitan flavour, is drained again and again—but at the bottom of the cup are a few glittering, gossamer threads woven by the gilded spider—the Casino—sucking, crushing, entralling all in its mystic web!

Prepared to drink deeply, Cornie and Clare arrived at the *Anglais* and later dined at the *Café de Paris*; then followed the crowd to the Casino.

“We’ll go through the Kitchen—the Devil’s Kitchen!” Clare announced as their car drew up to the entrance.

“The Kitchen?” Clare questioned.

“Haven’t you heard that before? It’s the first big room—the piker’s palace—small bets predominate.”

Cornie checked his hat and cane and they proceeded leisurely through the first hall, struck by a sudden hush rarely found in the most devout congregation. They stopped here and there in the *Salle de Jeux* to watch some cool system player jotting down each number as the little ball fell into a groove, and making comparisons with the printed deductions and charts of others; then proceeded to the inner sanctuary, the *Salle Privée*.

“No pikers here!” Cornie declared as he sauntered about seeking to find a lucky table.

“What is that little hunch-back doing here?” Clare asked as she pointed to the curious figure moving from table to table.

“Where is he?” was the excited reply.

“Over there!” pointing to the right.

“Come on!” he almost pulled Clare in that direction.

“Why—what in the world are you going to do?”

As they came up to the little man, Cornie stuffed a bill into his hand and then proceeded to rub his own hands over the hump.

“Come on, Clare—it’ll bring us luck!”

“Ugh! I should say not!” As she turned away, people came hurrying to the distorted creature.

“Here’s my place,” announced Cornie, taking a seat just vacated at a nearby roulette table. Clare stood back of him for a few moments.

“Hundred franc checks, please,” Cornie said to the croupier, who speedily pushed a stack to him and raked back the notes.

“I am going to start low—to get the feel of the table,” Cornie told Clare.

“Do you mind if I walk around a bit and see if I can find Meta and Clay? You know they said we’d probably meet them here.”

“Go ahead,” he answered, as he watched the croupier.

Clare strolled about, her lovely face and figure, her shimmering ultra low gown of wild rose peeping through her wrap of sapphire blue velvet shot with gold, and blue fox collar and cuffs, attracting no little attention. Numerous gentlemen of various nationalities offered her their arm, but sternly, although politely, were refused.

A quiet, unassuming appearing man came up to her. “Pardon, madam, I am an attendant of the Casino. Perhaps I can be of assistance in finding someone for you?” These eagle-eyed detectives let nothing pass them.

“I thank you. I am looking for some friends,” she replied and continued alone.

Finally she met Meta and Clay and profusely greeted them.

“Where is Cornie?” was Meta’s first question.

“Way down there! Just starting to play.”

“Let’s go and bring him luck,” Meta suggested.

“Wouldn’t you prefer to go up in the gallery and get a bird’s eye view first?” Clare suggested.

Meta and Clay agreed and the trio made their way through the crowds up the stairway and finally took seats where they could overlook the whole scene.

The shaded lights brought the green covered tables into relief with their double hedges—the borders of seated players and fringes of standing spectators. They made bright spots in the heavily carpeted room. Here a golden gown shone like sunshine rippling on water, there a soft blue brought forth thoughts of shimmering moonlight. Military and diplomatic uniforms heavy with gold lace added to the picturesqueness of the scene; the brilliant carmine of an exotic gown, the waving of enormous ostrich feather fans, the sparkle of jewels, the black and white of the civilian gentlemen, all made the hurry and turmoil of the outer world seem fabled lore and this the only reality! A fantastic moving picture come to life! The ladies’ hair—spun gold, pure white, modern henna—and the unusual number of bald heads of the men were outstanding spots.

“It seems alive!” Meta whispered to Clare. “The rattling of the chips, the scraping of the rakes, the excited voices seem to call us!”

“Little Roulette—I hear you calling me!” Clay mocked his sister.

“Look at that man over there with the scarlet uniform. Who can he be?” Clare asked.

“Probably a conductor on the Imperial Railroad!” Clay laughingly replied.

As they passed by the many tables they heard the monotonous droning of the croupiers as they called, “*Messieurs, faites vos jeux!*” and saw these automatons with their

mechanical gestures deftly rake in the counters, gold and notes and just as quickly push back the winnings.

"Hello, Cornie, old man!" Clay cried as they arrived at the table at which the latter was seated.

The tense expression of the player dropped like a mask from his features. "Hello there! Well, and there is Meta! Just a minute." He took the counters the croupier shoved to him and piled them neatly in front of him, then turned to greet them.

"Don't let us disturb you," Meta said.

"Oh, I'll let a couple of turns pass, I am only dribbling now. I'll start in earnest in a little while. How are you, anyway?" He greeted her cordially.

"Oh, do go on! I am so anxious to see you make a big winning!" Meta begged.

"I suppose you think I am going to break the bank," he replied with a laugh. "Well here goes—give me 1000 franc checks," he said, as he shoved those he had, together with a bunch of notes, to the croupier and received in return delicate oyster-like counters.

"Play the old combination, you know," Clare whispered; "7, 11 and 13!"

"No," he replied with a smile, "34, 35, and 36 are my stand-bys to-night—and the third dozen!" He placed a check on each of the three numbers.

Clare let her gaze pass slowly around the table, pausing as she reached each of the players. Next to Cornie was a handsome young Russian, full-chested and broad-shouldered, with delicate aristocratic features, dark skin, fiery black eyes, smoothly plastered jet black hair. He seemed chained to the table, intent only on the play at hand. Jerkily he placed his bets, taking his eyes from the checkered board only to rest their stare on the rolling ball. He won and lost with equal equanimity. He was an old hand, it was plain to see—it was almost business for him.

Next came a slight woman with a false bloom of youth on her very dark cheeks and a forced brilliance in her jaded eyes. She was plainly Latin, either Spanish or South American. Between her bets she stared at the men about the table and Clare felt sure she was appraising her chances of catching them in her net.

A clean-cut American lad sat next to her, plainly a college youth sent forth by an indulgent father, with a fat pocket-book to gain a finishing touch to his education. He was keenly enjoying the game, betting with reckless abandon, laughing as freely when his pile of chips diminished as when it increased, shoving every now and then to the adventuress by his side, a little stack—the tribute of youth to age. Clare could not but hope that he would not become entangled with the woman.

A German officer, still wearing his uniform and even his iron cross, arrogantly tossed bills instead of checks about the table. He constantly played the black as if to show he was still loyal to the Black Eagle.

Across the board was a strange couple—the man, a French boulevardier, weighty, phlegmatic! Under his eyes were ochre smudges, tell-tale puffs of a high life, more than half spent. He was perfectly groomed, his moustaches waxed to points, his toupé smoothly combed, a gardenia in his button-hole. His companion was a dainty elfin miss, vivaciously French, with a baby stare and bobbed hair. She kept begging for checks, which she scattered helter skelter over the board, while he now and then placed a single counter. He enjoyed watching her play. She kept constantly adjusting to her shoulders a magnificent chinchilla cape, which sent soft shudders up and down Clare's back as she saw the ripples in the downy fur. The man never smiled—his features held a sort of sardonic grimness, an immobile gaze—while she kept up an endless chatter.

An aged English dowager had the seat next to the couple.

She sat stiffly, as if trying to prove that dignity could be maintained even here. Her white hair was crowned with a jeweled tiara, her enameled face was smooth, accentuating her lynx-like eyes; her neck was enclosed in a wide collar of pearls, but her low cut gown displayed the ravages of age on the skin; the heavy brocade seemed a fitting frame. She played thoughtfully, resolutely, making several bets and seeming never to lose all she played. Her carefully piled checks neither grew nor disappeared. Occasionally she looked back of her and sought a straight, white-haired Englishman with a wide blue ribbon across his shirt front. He was strolling about in a small radius conversing with various men; whenever she saw him talking to a lady she would tap on the table with her fan and he would come directly to her side. She would then ask him what he thought about playing a certain number. If he agreed that she should, she would not do so. If he advised against it, she would play it. Shrugging his shoulders he would move away.

The man at Cornie's left was a Frenchman, young, gay, jovial, joking with all about him. He was down to his last check. He threw it on Number 13. As it was raked in by the croupier, he arose, murmuring under his breath. "What would he do?" Clare thought. So some are always cursing, some blessing the Goddess of Chance, the strength of whose temple is the weakness of the World!

Her gaze passed to Cornie. His desire for notoriety—his love of effect was apparent on his face. He was playing 1,000-franc checks! She saw the excited whispers of the French couple, the admiring glance of the American student, the envy of the Latin adventuress and the hatred in her look at Clare. The English dowager was again tapping her fan and whispering to her docile husband, who relayed the message to his friends. The croupier nodded to other attendants who made their way close to the table, and soon it was noised about that there was big play going on. The crowd increased

until every vantage point was taken, and others lurked nearby as if to gather some hope and courage from this "crazy American," as they called him.

Finally Cornie turned to Clare and Meta who were excitedly watching him as he kept a little better than even: "Here goes—each put a hand on my shoulder." Laughingly they complied, but Clare thought bitterly, "I am never above any one else in his thoughts; at best, on a level!"

He carefully pushed two counters on each of Numbers 34, 35, 36; then one between each; then one between 31 and 34, 32 and 35, 33 and 36; thus he had surrounded his numbers. Leaning over the American student whispered to the adventuress, "If any one of his numbers come, he stands to win over a hundred thousand francs!"

"*Mon Dieu!* We must follow him!" The same thought apparently occurred to the others about the table, for a perfect shower of chips soon covered these numbers.

Cornie fingered his remaining checks. "Just enough for another fling, if I don't strike it this time," he said.

Suddenly Meta leaned forward, just as the croupier took up the ball: "Put it all on the single 'O,'" she whispered excitedly.

Without hesitating a second, Cornie took his rake and pushed the whole six counters he had left on to the "O," which nobody was playing! Clare held her breath! The croupier's hand trembled as he spun the ball. The hum about the table seemed suddenly silenced; a tenseness was in the air; round and round the little ivory ball went its way—it slowed down—now it passed the "O"! Would it go around again? Slowly it crept on, then sank into the "O" as if to its home!

A perfect madhouse followed—French, Russian, English—all in a polyglot mixture! "He's dumped us!" the English lady could not restrain herself. She tapped angrily for her husband. "Why didn't we play the 'O'?" the student laughingly asked his side partner.

"He's broken the bank!" others exclaimed.

"He lost 12,000 francs on the thirties but he won 210,000 on the single 'O,'" the student explained further.

The croupier had sent for more cash to pay the bets. "The table is broke," Clay whispered.

"The man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo," Meta laughingly sang, "but you are not going to play any more to-day, are you?"

Surprised at her tone of authority, he looked up.

"You are going to quit now," she insisted. He obeyed without question.

As he folded the bunch of crisp bank notes, he turned to Clare, "Lucky Meta was here."

Clare nodded. She could not analyze her feelings. She wanted to tear up the notes. Somehow she felt she had been cheated. "She wasn't jealous," she told herself. "She was simply tired of this constant lowering, of her husband's appreciation of other women."

"We must surely have a blow-out now," Cornie continued. "Come on Clay, take my wife! I've got to look after my mascot!"

The cool evening breeze struck their faces with a soft massage. "Oh, what a relief," Clare gasped.

"It was insufferably hot inside," Clay agreed.

"To Circo's!" Cornie directed the chauffeur as they all climbed into the car, and started off for the famous cafe.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE NEXT morning Clare and Cornie again met Meta and Clay at the International pigeon shooting tournament. They were all seated on the wide verandah of the club house, facing the beautiful greensward where the contest was staged. When a marksman was ready to shoot, a pigeon would be released from a box the required distance away, and if killed, a dog would go out and fetch it back. One pigeon was not killed, only wounded, and circled back over the uncovered porch, dropping a seal of bright red blood on Clare's white sport suit.

"Bad luck, my dear," murmured a lady seated nearby.

"Bosh!" said Clay. "It's a sign of courage."

"A tip to play the red!" Cornie cried, at which they all laughed.

They idled the morning away, strolling through the gardens filled with rare palms, rubber trees, giant cactus and wonderful tropical shrubs.

"How perfectly spotless the roads and stairways are," Clay commented, as they climbed to a beautiful terrace commanding a wonderful view.

"It's the peculiar brilliance of the sun, as its beams are reflected from the mountain in back, that makes everything seem covered by clear liquid gold!" Clay explained.

"The light is so strong it almost makes one feel people can see straight through one," Meta laughingly remarked.

"You couldn't see straight through some of the people here!" Clay said. "They are so crooked, they'd deflect even these rays of the sun."

"Let's eat lunch *al fresco*. I hate to go indoors here," Clare suggested.

"That's just what I was thinking," Meta agreed.

After they were seated on the wide porch of the seaside cafe, Clare said to Cornie:

"Are we going to the opera to-night? *Aïda* is the program."

"Not me, when the Casino is running! You can go—perhaps Clay will take you. I want Meta with me, she's my mascot."

"Very well," Clare returned crisply. "Clay, will you bore yourself with an old married lady?"

"Marriage is the spice that adds flavor to many a romance," Clay replied. "I will be delighted, I am sure."

Cornie's attention was suddenly attracted to a very beautiful woman at a nearby table. "By Jove! Look over there!" he indicated the table at which she was seated. "Isn't she a beauty? Wonder who she is?"

"French, don't you think so?" Clare asked.

"Surely. Did you ever see such a Madonna-like face? And her hair! Like spun gold!"

"Rave on!" Meta urged sarcastically, "I suppose you'll want to ditch us now."

Clare looked at her rather sharply. She resented Meta's attitude.

"How can I meet her?" Cornie thought. "Wonder who the gink is who is with her? Looks like he might be her husband or brother—he's some relative that's a cinch—if he wasn't, he wouldn't be able to keep his hands off her—not to say his eyes!"

Cornie managed to prolong their stay at the table until the lady he had admired and her escort also left. He stared as if hypnotized. She turned several times and smiled.

"Meta and I are going to play at the Casino this afternoon," Cornie announced suddenly, as it occurred to him that by chance he might again see the lady there.

Clare raised her eyebrows in surprise. "Very well; if

Clay will play with me, I prefer to try the golf course here."

"Delighted!" Clay answered.

The golf course proved to be a most unusual one. Located on a shoulder of Mont Agel, overlooking Monte Carlo, it rises abruptly three thousand feet above the Mediterranean. As they approached the first tee, Clay said to Clare, "This air is like champagne, it seems to intoxicate one with the joy of living."

"I don't know whether this is a course for goats or humans," she answered, as she looked back to the depths from which they had come.

"A five thousand yard drive is certain if you leave the course," he laughingly remarked. "If you fall off, you will land either in France, Monaco, Italy, or the ocean."

"Or perhaps in the Kingdom of Heaven," Clare supplemented.

They both had splendid drives and as they approached the first green Clay said, "A curley putt—you seldom see one outside of Scotland." Each hole presented new problems and they were both tired out when their game was over.

At the Casino, just as Cornie had some chips in his hand ready to place on certain numbers, he felt some one looking at him. Glancing up, he actually saw the face, a mental picture of which had not left him since noon. The sudden realization of his wish seemed to daze him. He held the chips without dropping them on the green cloth. The croupier looked at him wondering at his slowness. At last Cornie pulled himself together and shoving his checks in front of Meta, excused himself and hurried in the direction that the lady and her companion were strolling. He caught up with them and followed a step behind, waiting, he did not know just for what.

"Perhaps the Goddess of Chance who surely resides here, will favor me," was the fantastic thought that ran through his excited brain.

An officer passing the lady turned suddenly and the hilt of his sword caught in her dress, tearing it. His apology was very profuse. Immediately she left her companion and hurried in the direction of the ladies' parlors.

"Here's my chance," Cornie decided. "While she is fixing the rip, I'll tackle the old man."

Approaching him, he said, "Pardon me, sir, but may I be so bold as to inquire if the lady who just met with the accident, is your wife?"

"Yes, she is, but whom have I the pleasure of addressing?" was the somewhat stiff and formal reply.

"Cheri Lopate." Cornie gave the name which he had assumed and used on all of his excursions into the Parisian studio and underworld sets, in order to avoid both the notoriety and the annoyance of being singled out in such crowds, as well as the danger of violence if he used his own name. He realized there were many who would think nothing of attacking a Wildner with the hope of finding his pockets lined with gold.

"Cheri Lopate?" the gentleman repeated; the name sounds familiar."

Cornie smiled; he had selected it with that very purpose. It sounded like many French names. "Perhaps—it is possible—you may have heard of me, I am a portrait painter!" Cornie had a mad idea to pose in that character, open a studio and get the lady to sit for him.

"Oh, yes, yes, I recall now. I have heard of you. Can I be of service?"

"Very much. I was struck by your wife's profile. She is just the type that I have been wanting to find." He was trying to make the suggestion very impersonal. "You know we like to vary our subjects. I have been in a rut, dark haired, fat old women. I must do some other type or I'll lose my—my knack," he finished.

"You would like to paint my wife's portrait?" The man

was plainly pleased. "But I am afraid I could not afford it."

"Please, please, allow me to do it for her, that is, for my Art's sake! If it pleases you I shall be happy to present it to you; if not, no harm will be done."

"My name is Lameraux, Adolph Lameraux, Deputy from the District of the Marne. We will be in Paris for some time. I am sure Madam Lameraux will be delighted to sit for you. Here she is now!"

The lady looked up at Cornie with startled eyes. She had appraised his staring at noon and knew he had sought her out.

"My dear, I wish you to meet a noted painter, Monsieur Lopate."

"Charmed, I am sure," she smiled, as she put out her hand. Cornie pressed it a little too vehemently.

"He has consented to paint your portrait, my dear."

"My portrait? Why, we can't afford that!" she replied in surprise.

"A beautiful woman can afford anything," Cornie boldly answered, as her husband laughed loudly.

"That's good! Oh, you artists! You are not afraid to assault the heavens! He wants to paint your type, my dear, for Art's sake—without charge!"

"But surely you are not accepting Monsieur Lopate's offer, however kind it is. I—"

"Do not refuse—really—it means so much to me," Cornie broke in.

"You cannot refuse the gentleman," her husband added. "I have always wanted your portrait."

"For your husband's sake, then," Cornie winked slyly as he said this.

"Very well, but I will be a poor subject, I assure you. When and where shall I come?"

"When do you return to Paris?" Cornie asked.

"To-morrow evening," Monsieur Lameraux replied.

"I shall let you know to-morrow noon. I will see you at the Cafe?"

"Yes, we always lunch there. Good-bye," she waved her hand in adieu.

Cornie stood for a moment watching her tall, slender figure as it slowly drew away from him, then hurried back to Meta, who was making small bets in his absence.

"I met someone I knew—pardon my staying away."

"Oh, that's all right," Meta replied. "You take my seat, and I'll watch a while," his own seat having been taken.

Cornie had only moderate success and was prepared to leave when Clare and Clay met them. Later he sent a telegram to a friend in Paris, a poor portrait painter who had a studio in the Latin Quartier and whose wild parties he had often attended.

"Georges Loré, *Rue de Vaugirard*;" he addressed it. "Will rent your studio one month, your price, also your services. Reply if both my disposal. Cheri Lopate."

The next morning a reply came:

"Everything I am or have always at your service.

Georges Loré."

"That's settled!" Cornie exulted. "Now for gay Paree!"

Clay had planned a trip up to *La Turbie* overshadowing Monte Carlo for the next morning, but Cornie begged off and was left to seek his new friends. At noon he gave them his studio address and made an appointment for the second day following.

In the evening he informed Clare that they would leave the next day. "I have some business that calls me back to Paris at once," he gave as his reason for cutting short their visit.

They said good-bye to Meta and Clay, who were to remain for awhile and then join them.

## CHAPTER XVII

As soon as possible after his arrival in Paris, Cornie called on his friend Georges Loré and took over the latter's studio.

"You will have to take a room elsewhere, old man," he told him, "but you are to be where I can get you on short notice."

He rearranged the studio and fixed some screens close to the easel usually used by the painter.

"Set up another easel here," indicating a space behind the screen; "a lady will sit there," pointing to a seat from which she could not see behind the screen. "I will pretend to paint her portrait out here and you actually will paint it back of the screen. But whenever I draw the curtain over my work—you get out! The door is right back of you, lock it and stay out, until I call you. Do you understand?"

"Quite," Georges replied. "When will the lady come?"

"Tomorrow afternoon, but I will not need you the first day. You can get out in the morning."

Clare noticed Cornie was in an unusually excited state but she said nothing about her observation.

The new owner of the studio had the stage all set for the arrival of Monsieur and Madam Lameraux. Numerous new fittings brightened up the rooms and the door bore a plate with the name "Cheri Lopate" emblazoned thereon.

Welcoming them not too warmly, with a professional air, Cornie showed them about the studio, then discussed the portrait. After it had been decided to make it full length, Monsieur Lameraux excused himself, pleading an engagement.

After he had closed the door on the husband, Cornie turned to the wife: "What a vision of loveliness!" he ex-

claimed. "You'll pardon me, Madam, but my artistic sense carries me away. Today—I cannot paint—I must study my subject."

She smiled quietly as if accustomed to flattery. "I fear I will make a very poor subject," she returned.

He ignored her comment and crossed to her side. "Your hair," he touched it lightly, "it's almost too light to be called golden, and your eyes too grey to be called blue. Your color is just as delicate. You have an illusive charm that I fear the canvas cannot catch and reproduce."

"Is it customary for artists to—ah—study those sitting for portraits?" she asked warily.

"Indeed yes. One must acquire the proper atmosphere. Why, some artists feel it necessary to make love to their models in order to bring a proper expression to their features!"

"And do you do that also?"

"When the occasion demands. And I fear—you are too serious about this thing. I may have—"

"Serious! Don't think I didn't see through your subterfuge. You can't afford to paint my picture without pay."

"I'll admit you captured me from the first glimpse I caught sight of you. Money—bah! What is money to love?"

"Now he's starting," she said half to herself. And then to him, "Tell me, how could you afford 'Monte'—you a poor struggling artist?"

"A mad interval between ennui, desire and privation, my dear. A fling for a few days, to obliterate the emptiness of life, until you came into it!"

"Much like us," she replied. "My husband is not a rich man, but his position as deputy requires certain things."

Suddenly, he took both her hands and drew her to him. "You know I am mad about you!"

"Oh, but my husband—"

"Forget him. Enjoy the deliciousness of our first meeting

alone. I'll give you everything. That ivory neck needs a string of wonderful pearls, those dainty fingers are crying for diamonds!"

Her face took on a puzzled look—she was more surprised at each succeeding promise. "But where could you get the money? You are dreaming."

He hesitated—he had forgotten his impersonation. "Dreaming? Yes, but you forget, the Fates were kind to me at 'Monte.' I will get you everything you can wish for."

Suddenly she pressed a kiss on his lips.

"You are a dear," she told him, "but I really must go now."

"And you do care for me a little bit?"

A nod of her richly dowered head was the only reply as he helped with her wraps.

"To draw love from a woman is like pulling fish from a pool—if you only use the right bait, you can always land them," he thought to himself as he called a taxi and took his latest haul to her apartment.

The succeeding days found the arrangement working out to Cornie's full satisfaction. The real painter behind the screen, the pretender in front, and the dupe before them both! A constantly growing intimacy resulted from the frequent sittings and home takings.

Finally during the absence of her husband from Paris on official business, Cornie succeeded in getting his fair model to accompany him to the races at Longchamp. They registered as M. and Mme. Cheri Lopate. He told Clare that he was going with a party of men. Meta and Clay had arrived in Paris and she went about with them. Cornie had told them of his studio and also of his pseudonym, saying that he really wanted to do something worth while in sculpturing. He always had a knack for modeling, so they accepted his latest stunt as a new whim.

Clay was invited to several very wild parties in the studio.

Cornie's neighbors in the *Quartier*, male and female, were quick to accept his open-handed hospitality. Three art students almost succeeded his old Heart-Mates crowd in his affections, Paul Bergerac, Henri Guillard and Louis de Maggio—the first two Frenchmen and the last an Italian.

Monsieur Lameraux was called back to his home in the country for a week. So as the final celebration of their "vacation," Cornie's term for their complete freedom, he planned a wonderful party in his studio for the evening before M. Lameraux's intended return. His wife was to meet him at the depot and accompany him on a government mission to Algeria. The completed portrait was sent to Monsieur Lameraux at his home.

"An Egyptian Night," Cornie called the party, for which the studio rooms had been emptied of their usual furnishings and the illusive charm of ancient Egypt substituted. It had become an old banquet hall with marble pillars on the sides, between which glimpses of the green Nile and the blue of desert heavens could be seen. Scattered about were mute sphinxes, dogs with heads of men, bull-headed idols impassively viewing the strange hieroglyphics on plaques suspended from the pillars! Weird music, the clash of cymbals, struck the ears of the first guests. At one end of the large room, on a throne with golden griffens on either side, sat Marie Lameraux, a regal Cleopatra, in a robe of pale jade green, open on either side and clasped with golden bees. Bracelets of pearls circled her arms, and a golden pointed diadem crowned her hair..

Cornie was her Egyptian Master of Ceremonies. His skin was bronze, his eyes oblique, his heavy hair plaited into little cords; a narrow strip of cotton about his loins; several strings of glass beads and a few armlets constituted his costume.

Several waiters of nearby cafes, accustomed to anything, were made up as slaves. One stood beside the Queen gently

waving a huge feather over her head. Another opened the door for the guests, introducing them to Cornie, who presented them.

"Gracious Queen!" he called, "Kyra, one of your dancers is here!" as Lola Tuite, a familiar figure on the boulevards and a recently acquired addition to Cornie's coterie of intimate lady friends, bowed. Her gown was made up of myriads of pearls draped and joined in every conceivable fashion. "And Mark Antony,"—who was Paul Bergerac.

"Lamia, an Athenian maiden," was his next announcement, of Adele, a famous model of the *Quartier*.

"And the Nomarch—Amoun-Ra!" as Henri Guillard stepped in.

"Flora, a Roman courtesan, with Cheapsiro, commander of Hermothybia;" was the announcement of Musette, another model, and Louis De Maggio. All were in the briefest costumes appropriate to the personages they represented.

Clay arrived next—he was Caesar, attired in a linen tunic constellated with stars, a purple mantle over his shoulders. "You should have had Clare and Meta here, they'd have enjoyed it," he told Cornie.

"I am Cheri Lopate. I do not know the ladies you speak of. Come on, forget 'em or I'll have my Queen's slaves throw you into the Nile! Get busy! There's a cocktail shaker and all the ingredients. These Frenchies don't know how to mix a good one!"

The others were soon swinging into a frenzied dance and Cornie went over to Marie, "Oh, it's wonderful—such atmosphere!" she said to him as she sniffed the air, heavily scented with perfumes.

The door-keeper ushered in Armond Belanger, a neighboring sculptor, dressed as an Egyptian oarsman clad only in a pair of narrow drawers diagonally striped, a red helmet-like cap topping the costume. He had a girl art student on each arm—they were ladies of the Queen's court. The one

on the right looked about and then crossed to Clay. " *Monsieur*, I am your partner," she said.

"Just in time for a real American cocktail!" greeted Clay, handing her a brimming silver goblet.

"Come hither!" Cornie gathered the strange company about the table at which Clay was officiating. "Gaze upon the modern alchemist! He mingles all pleasure in one salubrious draught. Go to it!"

They grabbed the goblets and danced away.

"I'm going to put on a real *Midnight Frolic*, Clay old man!" Cornie boasted.

"Lay on Ziegie, you've plenty of ammunition here," pointing to the assembled bottles.

"Look at Cleo!" Cornie indicated Marie, "and remember one glance once caused the loss of half a world!"

The slaves distributed tiny bows with arrows of rubber among the guests. Dancing partners were selected by shooting at them. Later when they were all feeling gay and the contents of the bottles were fast disappearing, Cornie announced that it was the Queen's pleasure to view some original dances and poses by her guests. "First," he said, "we will see Kyra, the Egyptian, in her famous dance, the *Sphinx*, reincarnated in the owl of the *Quartier*, Lola Tuite."

The music started with tantalizing, quivering wails, Lola began a shivery, creepy dance, flitting about, now leaning far forward, now as far backward, her supple hands folding and unfolding like snakes twisting and untwisting over and about her body, her many pearls rising and falling with each movement. The cymbals clashed, the weird strains grew in intensity, until the end seemed the howling of a pack of wolves screeching at the prostrate figure!

"Now Flora, the Roman beauty, in a classic pose, the Roman Conqueror!" Cornie announced. As the girl stepped forward, a slave sprawled flat at her feet; deftly slipping off her flowing robe, she stepped on his chest, upholding her arms in triumph!

A burst of applause followed as Cornie grabbed her and swung into a fox-trot as the music started in again.

The guests were sprawling over the benches; the girls and men hugging, embracing and kissing with a tipsy enthusiasm for each other, as they arose and gyrated about the room.

At midnight the slave waiters brought in tables and heaped them with dishes prepared in imitation of ancient repasts. The *chef* of a nearby cafe accompanied his productions and proudly announced them as: the livers of scarus fish; eels fattened upon human flesh; peacocks' brains, and stuffed boar's head. The guests reclined on benches drawn up to the table in ancient eastern fashion, and Cornie rested his head on Marie's white shoulder as he attempted to replace her crown with a garland of flowers. With feasting, drinking and dancing, the night of revelry wore on and with the morning, breakfast was served. At last Cornie led Marie away. They changed into their street clothes and started for the depot to meet M. Lameraux.

"Farewell, beauteous Cleopatra," Cornie sighed as he pressed a passionate kiss on her lips before they left the taxicab. She closed her eyes as if to prolong the bliss of the moment and held him close to her.

"What sweet memories, my dear one, we will always have of the making of your portrait," he added.

"Who knows, Cheri my darling, we may meet again," she breathed softly.

On the return trip, Cornie dozed until he was suddenly awakened by the shouts of his friends waiting for him in the studio windows. Only Paul, Henry and Louis were left of the party. "We returned our girls to their roosts, changed to our street clothes, and are now awaiting, Cheri, for your suggestion of a final thrill, *la fin* of your wonderful party. It's only ten o'clock in the morning," Henry sang

out. "You know eleven is the conventional Parisian ending of the night before!" as he drained a champagne bottle.

Cornie filled himself a brimming goblet and suddenly reeling about said: "All righto, we'll finish these three quarts of *Pol Roger*—then I've a trick left in my bag yet. I'll give you boys a sight worth while!"

"Cheri is going to come across with a real treat!" Paul cried with tipsy enthusiasm, "What the hell will it be?"

"A surprise and a damn good one, I know, because Cornie never fails to deliver the goods," Louis said. He was not as drunk as the others, not that he had imbibed less, but he could stand more.

"Lead on, we follow," he added laughingly as he drew his staggering companions into a single file and pushed Cornie to the head. They marched down to a taxi and Cornie told the chauffeur, "Hotel Continental," as they rolled away.

## CHAPTER XVIII

IT HAD become such a common occurrence for Cornie to remain away all night, that on this occasion it caused Clare no surprise. After such a debauch she often did not see him until dinner the next day, so she was totally unprepared for him to respond to her call for her maid.

She had just completed her morning bath and was ready for her daily massage.

As she stepped from the tub, her perfectly formed body, glistening wet, gleaming with a ravishing beauty in the sunlight that streamed in the window, and stood poised, her right foot resting on the edge of the tub with a swanlike grace, Cornie opened the door!

“Good-morning, my dear—only the boys dropped in to say ‘hello’ to you,” he exclaimed, as he pushed the door wide open and led his boon companions, Paul, Henri, and Louis into the room. They followed him like sheep.

“Gentlemen, my—” he caught himself; “my white marble lady! I give you your first view of the most perfectly formed woman in all Paris!” he waved his hand like a show-barker as if to say, “Drink in the sight!”

In the shock of horror at the humiliation Cornie was causing her, Clare saw they were all intoxicated. She had brought no robe with her, and as she turned for a towel to cover her nakedness, Cornie pulled it away.

Words would not come to her; she stood abashed, the blush of shame on her cheeks, the inaction of fright and fear in her limbs!

“As graceful as a palm tree, as lithe as myrtle boughs!” Cornie continued, his eyes showing plainly a gloating pride, as if he were displaying a prized statue or painting.

Paul Bergerac gazed upon the unveiled form with a covetous desire that expressed itself in the nervous twitching of his hands. This view was, for him, only a temptation to possess. "*Mon Dieu!* How perfect! If only—" was his befuddled muttering as he stared.

Henri Guillard was keenly enjoying the simple fact of the present moment. He followed the divine undulating line from throat to feet. The perfection of form entranced him. "A nymph, and satyrs," he breathed.

Only Louis de Maggio, less drunk than the rest, glanced for a second at a time and turned away, as if blinded by the sunshine of her beauty. The exquisite tints of the ripe skin would continually overcome his innate modesty. He felt a sense of worship, an admiration for God's greatest handiwork. The perfection of physique, unveiled for judgment, gave him a sensation of rest. The glowing face, the heated cheek, the frightened glance, the golden hair shining in the sunbeams, the roundness and curves of the torso, the ruddy glow of the wet skin—to look upon these things was for him like gratifying the thirst. "A spectacle for the Gods!" was his thought. There was no sensuous desire in his eyes, only an appreciative wonder.

Clare met his mute gaze and recognized that he alone would protect her, but she was speechless, unable to ask his aid.

"I have gazed upon the sweet Spanish," Cornie maudlinly rambled, "the delicate Italian, the massive Swiss, the vivacious French, the buxom English, the classic Greek maidens, but none, no, absolutely none, can equal the all-American!" He ended with a flourish of his hand toward Clare, as a showman calls attention to his wares.

Finally Clare's troubled eyes met Louis' in a silent appeal that he felt called upon to answer even before she framed her simple request, "Please, please go!"

With a sudden start as if he had just realized the situation,

Louis exclaimed: "Cheri, can't you see the girl is scared stiff. Come on!" As he took hold of him, he declared solemnly: "Cheri Lopate, I've got to put you out."

Cornie jerked away. "Let me alone!" he said crossly, and resumed his drunken boasting: "I always dressed her in the newest fashion—there you have it—the newest and the oldest, too," he chuckled.

Grabbing Cornie firmly by the back of his coat collar, Louis held him by it with one hand, and shoved Paul ahead with the other. Henri followed, mumbling, "You certainly gave us an eyeful, Cheri."

"She's mine, let me alone!" Cornie protested. "I can show off my Love Toy if I want! Let me go!" His lips were curled in a contemptuous smile.

After Louis had successfully herded them out into the hall and she heard the outer door close, Clare collapsed. Her maid found her shortly thereafter on the floor, a limp, inert mass.

When she regained consciousness, a weary and disheartened woman, she determined that this was the last indignity that she could stand from her husband. The humiliating scene would never leave her memory until its walls crumbled in Death. His passion seemed to have scorched and burned her very soul!

Since his father's death and the receipt of his wealth, Cornie had showered her with everything that the treasure world of beauty and comfort could desire and money buy. The only mourning that he did for his father was to regret that he had not gone sooner, so that he could have come into possession of his fortune a little earlier.

Clare had long since decided that the sensuous and the ideal can never be reconciled; that Cornie's love of beauty was not a pure ideal, but had no expression without an accompanying passion and was never free from the latter. It had no significance without such gross attendant feeling.

She had built a house with a foundation of Beauty and a roof of Ideals, but never lived in it.

"There seems no way to satisfy Cornie's imperious need for the company of beautiful women," she pondered dispiritedly. "What has my beauty brought me? Why did I ever renounce my soul's desire for Jean and all his life represents? I sold myself to the highest bidder! How different am I with education and so-called culture, a society bud, than an ignorant, common girl of the chorus or street whose only asset is an exterior beauty of face or form or both?"

She did not realize that there are two different types of beauty, one the outward bodily appearance, the other the exterior revelation of the soul. The expression in Greek statues always reveals a great and composed spirit. The one is a mere stimulation to sensuous desires, a pretence of beauty only—a deceptive fraud; while the other is a real call to honest love, a sound beauty, that will last as long as the soul remains true. Clare had dulled her soul-sense when she renounced its desire, and had dimmed her soul-perception of right and wrong. She consented to the whims of her husband because he paid her well to do so, and they were privately acted. It was only when he subjected her to this gigantic humiliation before others, and those his intimates, that her soul realized the enormity of its fall.

"I can stay with him no longer," she decided finally; and calling her maid, told her to pack a bag of her things. Just where she should go or what she should do, she did not know; only that to continue living with her husband was impossible. She directed her maid to pack her trunks and said she would let her know where to send them and to meet her.

"I must go somewhere—anywhere—until, yes, there is no question about it, until I can let Jean know," she thought to herself, as she started to look for some of her things through

the drawers of the desk that she and Cornie had used jointly. She noticed an envelope addressed to Cornie in his father's handwriting, that had apparently dropped from a pigeon-hole. Mechanically she picked it up and threw it into her bag.

She reached Clay by telephone, he was the only one to whom she could turn. He came to her and hesitatingly she told him what had happened. Although he could enjoy Cornie's orgies, he could not fathom the depth of degradation that would permit of such action toward his wife, and felt a sudden sickness of the man whom he termed his friend.

He said he would make inquiries as to when she could secure passage for home and attend to the same for her. He called later to say that he had been able to get accommodation on the *Aquitania* from Cherbourg for the next day.

Then she dispatched the following cablegram to Jean:

“Am leaving on *Aquitania* for New York tomorrow. Arrive 15th. Meet me at pier. Leaving Cornie forever.

“CLARE.”

She determined to go to the Hotel Crillon for the night, so as to avoid meeting Cornie if he should return. She left a simple but expressive note:

“You realize the impossibility of our going on together. This is the end. Do not follow me. It is useless. I want nothing from you and will take immediate steps to secure a divorce.”

She stopped to sign her name, and suddenly a verse she had read somewhere occurred to her. She added:

“You will live and die,  
A rose-fed pig in an aesthetic sty!”

and then signed it:

“CLARE.”

Late in the afternoon she went to the Hotel Crillon and engaged a room. While waiting for an elevator, she noticed a French woman of unusual type sitting close by. As she was about to step into the car, Cornie entered the lobby and came up to the woman, saying: "You are on time for once; how do you feel after last night?"

Clare stepped aside instead of getting into the elevator, and heard the reply: "Better, since my rival has gone!"

Cornie seemed to sense Clare's presence and turned to her. "What are you doing here, my dear!" he asked with a sneering smirk.

"I have just engaged a room. I am leaving you," she answered simply.

"Entirely unnecessary! Go back to the Continental. I will not bother you further." He was sober, she noted. "Lola and I will take the room you engaged here." He turned toward the Frenchwoman: "Lola, meet Mrs. Cornelius Wildner, my wife—until to-day!" The woman bowed stiffly. "Clare, this is Lola Tuite, your successor to be!"

Clare gazed in astonishment. She was a new type to her. Tall, thin, and straight in outline, she wore a strange oriental-looking dress and a quantity of clattering and clanking beads and chains which hung from her neck and dangled from her waist and hips. A little turban of gold cloth, drawn tightly down to very black eyebrows, topped her attire. Two stiff wings of jet black hair, sticking out in sharp points in a direct line between her ears, almost hid her cheeks, which were heavily painted and powdered a dull white. Her lips were colored a wine red. She twitched her very white and shapely hands nervously, her only lack of composure. Her dress was a bright henna with slippers and stockings to match.

Clare looked at her coldly: "It is customary to await the death of the queen before crying, 'God save the Queen,'" she remarked. "I will return to the Continental for to-night. I

am leaving for America to-morrow and will start divorce proceedings at once."

"Indeed," he declared, "you will not! Lola and I are leaving on the Aquitania to-morrow and *I*—yes *I*—will start the proceedings. Do you comprehend? You will remain here until *I* have secured the divorce."

She looked at him in unfeigned amazement. "You—you contemptible cur!" she cried in her fury and astonishment, "what possible grounds can you have?"

"Let us go up to your room. I detest a public scene," he asserted as he looked at several people who were eyeing them curiously. Dazed with the shock of his announcement, Clare accompanied them to the upper floor.

"A certain letter, my dear, and a reply," he began after they were seated.

"To what do you refer?" she feigned ignorance of his meaning.

"A very effusive confession that you made to my dear brother Jean on the exciting night of our engagement, and his answer." He quietly snapped out the hateful words.

She knew it was useless to plead further lack of knowledge. "Where did you get them?" was all she could say.

"You remember how frightened you became, when you had told me that the key to your jewel case also opened the inside drawers? Let me see, that was the morning after our marriage. Well, I wondered what those drawers could contain that the slip had so upset you. Apparently you forgot all about it after we were settled on the steamer, for you made no objection when the next evening—the second of our married life—I asked you for the key to your jewelry box. I wanted my dress links and studs, and said I would go into our parlor and dress for dinner ahead of you. You gave me the key. I found the letters and took them, as I believed I had a right to do. My wife's love letters were

safer in my possession than her own. I am surprised you never missed them."

She calmed herself as she listened to his disclosure. When he had finished, she said: "I promised myself, when I locked them away, as I locked my love away in my heart, that I would not open either as long as you were my husband. I have been true to my promise. Since your outrageous treatment of me yesterday, I do not consider you my husband any longer."

"Thank you," he said cynically, "I never considered you my wife since the time I found those letters, the first day of our married life! I knew then that you did not love me. It was not very pleasant information for me, I assure you. I could not have discussed it then as now. I realized that you had married me only to satisfy your craving for luxury, society, and travel—and I had always loved you devotedly!"

She sat mute, overcome by the fact of his knowledge.

"Well, I gave you all you expected. I had cravings, too. I satisfied them also, took what I wanted. I made you my Love Toy! I am tired of you now. I throw you away like a broken toy—and I take a new one," he sneered as he leered toward Lola.

"You savage, you brute!" Clare boiled over with indignation. "You ruined my life, and now you want to spoil my reputation—all that I have left!"

"The Lord giveth. He taketh away," blasphemed Cornie, with a diabolical smile.

"You and your love for Beauty—frauds both—I hate you!" she sobbed, as she finally saw that she had been made captive by Cornie and not he by her.

"Like your love, and your soul desire," he returned with equal bitterness.

"I married you, loving you with all the intensity of my passions. You were the embodiment of the Spirit of Beauty to me; then I discovered that letter, the index to your mind

and heart. I determined to squeeze you as dry as I would a lemon; to take my fill of your beauty and when I grew tired of you, discard you. That time has come. Do you think I would care to have a woman as my wife, whose charms I had openly exhibited as I did yours? No, it is *I*, not you, who will get the divorce."

"Don't think for a moment that I will let you get away with that! I'll fight to the bitter end!" she said with determination.

"What of your reputation, then? Will you tell of the recent scene in the Continental?" he replied. "You may have two choices, stay here in Paris, or go to my brother Jean; he and his adopted child will no doubt welcome you. I give you to them, but you go as you came to me. You'll not take a penny of my money! Jean may give you what you want on his few thousand a year. His income perhaps might buy you one gown a month—and you had—how many?"

"The path of dishonor is always open. I *will* go to Jean," she decided aloud. "I should never have married you! *You have the morals of a tom cat!*" was her final fling as she left the room. She realized she had not taken the honors in their verbal battle.

Lola Tuite had sat silently puffing a cigarette, thoroughly enjoying the scene; and when Clare had gone, she asserted, "You will marry me, when you have divorced her. *Un de perdu, deux de retrouvés!*"

"Marry you? Never! You came to me as a Love Toy, and so you will remain. When I have my divorce—I will marry, yes, but someone who always has loved me." He saw in a vision, pretty Meta Clay and the worshipping eyes with which she always regarded him. It was only recently in Monte Carlo that he realized her love and that her piquant prettiness had appealed to him and finally "got" him, as he put it in his own thoughts.

"You are like a Frenchman," she said resignedly. "He never marries his mistress. Even when his wife dies he selects someone else and his mistress remains—his mistress. *Ah mais! à votre áise*—only be good to me, I ask no more," she finished appealingly.

He kissed her and threw her a diamond ring he had purchased that morning.

"You darling," she wept her gratefulness on his shoulder.

On the Aquitania there sailed: Cornelius M. Wildner and Lola Tuite, registered as Mr. and Mrs. C. M. Wildner; and Clare Wildner, registered simply as C. Wildner. The latter avoided the other passengers as much as possible and sought not to meet her husband and his companion. The first night out she found a secluded seat in the beautiful *lounge*, but the cheerful music brought thoughts that forced her out on the deck, where she sat in solitude until a late hour.

The next day she saw her husband and Lola engaging in a lively game of shuffle-board, but managed to avoid an out and out meeting throughout the voyage. The days seemed to be leaden, they passed so slowly, but finally the end came.

With what different thoughts she returned to her native country, than when she left it! Her bark of happiness had floundered on the Shoals of Marriage. She felt, as she crossed the ocean, that the Waves of Destiny were carrying her back to "Soul's Desire" where she hoped to find peace and solace with Jean in the Mountains of Love.



PART VI  
MOUNTAINS OF LOVE



## CHAPTER XIX

IT WAS a composed woman who came down the gang plank and met Jean with a simple handshake. Clare's desire was to throw her arms about his neck, and cry, "Take me, I am yours forever!" but actually she said, "I will go to the Modore until I decide what I shall do." She avoided her husband and his companion as they left the steamer.

Mr. and Mrs. Emerson did not know of their daughter's arrival as she had not advised them of her homecoming, wishing to make her plans first.

Finally freed of customs requirements, Jean took Clare to the hotel. After securing her room they went to lunch together in the cafe. There she unburdened herself and asked what she should do. He advised that she stay in the city a few days, rest, and consider her situation. He did not wish to urge her to come to him too quickly, so she remained at the Modore during four hot July days, while they almost constantly discussed her future.

Jean advised that she should come to "Soul's Desire" to recuperate her health and spirits. Clare voiced her dissent because of the opportunity it would afford others to drag their names in the mire of scandal.

"You must come," Jean insisted. "My heart is dusty—parched for the want of the rain of your love."

"How can you love me now? I am blackened—unclean—impure! You are still white—clean—pure!"

"Though the white diamond be cast in the dust, its purity cannot be lastingly sullied," he replied.

"People will point the finger of guilt at us," she countered.

"You are still my sister-in-law!" was his persistent answer. "You surely may visit your brother-in-law and

nephew without stirring up the gossips' tongues. Come to "Soul's Desire," he pleaded, "Keats and I are longing for you."

When she finally consented, Clare telephoned her mother at "World's End," where her parents were living, and simply told her that she had left Cornie and was going to "Soul's Desire."

As she expected, her mother could not understand why she should not come home. Clare could not even think of meeting her friends, and those of her parents, in her present mental state. It seemed that only the peace, quiet, and isolation of "Soul's Desire" could calm her and that without Jean's companionship, she simply could not go on.

At last her mother saw the futility of further argument. Clare was told that her parents would go up to "Soul's Desire" for the week-end to see her.

And so to "Soul's Desire" Clare Wildner went, heedless of her reputation, caring only for the peace that she was sure would come with Jean and Keats.

"I thought I '*loved*' Cornie, but it was only what he could give me. Now I know it was only you I was '*in love*' with. One may '*love*' often, but be '*in love*' only once. The latter is like a torrent rush of feeling, which can move only toward one person!" Clare gave vent to her feelings.

"I know what you mean," Jean agreed softly. "A flood of water may embrace and surround several islands, but it can not very well flow in more than a single direction at one time. It can not last forever. Either it subsides into a lake-like stage or runs itself out and disappears forever. Our love is just reaching the lake stage and so it will stand deep and pure, peaceful and quiet."

"God grant it may ever be so!" breathed Clare with deep feeling in her voice.

"You must forget the past and live only in the present," Jean advised sincerely. Clare tried her best to follow this

advice, but when her parents arrived, it all came back to her with a rush of feeling.

"How worn out you look, my dear child!" her father remarked as he kissed her. "Your European trip hardly seems to have agreed with you."

"No, it certainly did not," Clare admitted the truth of his comment.

"Whatever happened?" her mother greeted her in an excited manner. "Your letters were always so cheerful! This is such a shock."

Slowly, haltingly, Clare gave her parents a vivid account of her married life.

Sympathize with her they did, but understand her they did not.

"If you only had not written that awful letter, or if you had destroyed it when Jean returned it to you! Why did you keep them?" lamented her mother, "I know Cornie loved you, until he found those letters."

"It was very careless of you!" her father impatiently complained. "You would have saved yourself so much!"

"Perhaps," she admitted, "but it would have come sooner or later! You see, I never loved him."

"Love! Bah! Look what he gave you!" was her father's caustic comment. "Love is all very well in movies and books—but in real life—" he left his hearers to surmise the rest.

"Having is not everything, that much I have learned," was her positive retort.

"I think Cornie might have outgrown his eccentricities, if you had been a little more patient with him; one must overlook many things in a man of unlimited means," was Mr. Emerson's criticism.

"Unlimited nerve—unending passion you mean!" cried Clare. "If money is the pass to every sensuous gratification, it should be forcibly taken away from men like Cornie!"

"Perhaps, if I write to Cornie," her father suggested,

"he may take you back. Such things have been patched up!"

"Take me back!" she laughed. "Hardly! As if I ever would go back!"

"Well, what do you propose to do now?" Mrs. Emerson expressed her exasperation. "You cannot stay on here indefinitely."

"I will remain here until Cornie secures his divorce. Then I will see."

"Gets his divorce!" Emerson snorted in angry tones. "You will not let him besmirch our name—and go scot free without paying you alimony."

"It shows how little you know your own daughter!" was the spirited reply. "I could not contest if I wished—my letter would convict me—and I would not accept his money. He cannot pay me off like his mistresses! But anyway, he said he would not give me a penny, so you need not expect that."

"Surely you do not think *I* want his money?" her father implored her.

"Forgive me, I know I am cruel; but I have suffered so much that I am heedless of what I say."

"How can he get a divorce—he is a Catholic?"

"There are ways and means to accomplish many seemingly impossible things," she replied.

"And if he does secure it?" her mother probed.

"I will marry Jean—if he will have me."

Simultaneously her parents threw up their hands in horror. Mrs. Emerson first recovered her voice.

"Your reputation! Our friends! What will they say?"

"Undoubtedly agree with you, that your daughter is crazy to leave her rich husband for his poor brother," Clare answered concisely.

Her father suddenly blazed out: "You are no daughter of mine, if you continue to live here like this. It was bad enough

to write such a crazy letter—and make a fuss over a lot of damn foolishness, and run away from a good sensible husband who worshipped your beauty, perhaps too much. But to come here like a brazen hussy and tell us, while you are legally bound to one man, that you propose to marry another! Is this what the Catholic religion has taught you?"

"My kind, sympathetic father," Clare replied ironically; "I will be the guilty party in our divorce action. I will be read out of my adopted church—bell, book, and candle. It is more likely that your rigid strict training has upset my moral code. Money was the God before whom you taught me to bow down; Society, the priests upon whom I must fawn; and Pleasure, the great Heaven I must seek! All this I have done—you see me to-day—the Wheels of your Gods have ground my life to a very fine pulp."

Mrs. Emerson was weeping. Clare never remembered seeing her shed tears before. "I can't bear it, it's too much!" she sobbed at last. "I tried so hard to make you happy."

"Happy? That is what I propose to be—and will be! Then you have no cause to complain."

"But not in such a way!" her mother objected.

"Happiness makes its own way!" Clare epitomized her feelings.

"Unless you have a reconciliation with your husband, I wash my hands of you!" Her father had finally decided on the stand he would take.

She looked at her mother, who was again weeping. Mrs. Emerson met her glance with a hostile eye. "Your father is right. It is our duty to be firm. Choose between us—your husband and your parents against—"

Just at this moment Jean came up to them; she finished by pointing at him.

He looked at the group in surprise, as he sensed the tenseness of the situation.

Clare extended her hand. Jean grasped it fervently. "I choose my Soul Mate!" she announced proudly.

"Call our car please!" Mrs. Emerson turned to her husband: "We are no longer of any importance in our daughter's life."

Her father glared at Clare, as if unable to comprehend that she could be as firm as they were, and hurried down the steps to the garage.

"Why, Clare, what has happened?" Jean asked.

"My parents have issued an ultimatum," she explained: "Either I return to my husband, or they 'wash their hands of me,'" she repeated. "I suppose that means that they will cease to consider me as their daughter!"

The car came up to the porch and with an exceptionally arrogant toss of her head Mrs. Emerson moved majestically to her seat, and without further words, Clare's parents drove away.

"You did that—for me?" Jean could not restrain the wonder from his voice as he took her in his arms.

Suddenly the tension gave way and Clare sobbed on his breast as she had done as a little child on her mother's.

"There, there," he petted her. "It will all come out all right."

She raised trusting eyes to his. "You will have to be father and mother to me, as well as husband."

"Even that will I be," he answered; the phrase had a vague familiarity to Clare. She considered it for a moment, then recalled his reply to her confessional letter—"You ask me to be your back-ground, your life-line, to which you can cling when in need. *Even that will I be!* I can cling to you alone!" she echoed her need.

"I will draw you to the Land of Happiness, across the Ocean of Faith," was the comforting reply.

"Is it wrong for us to tell how much we care for each other, while I am still legally another's wife?" Clare asked Jean one evening as they sat in the moonlight.

"So long as our actions are pure, and we know that we

have done no wrong, why should we hesitate to voice our desires, our feelings, our hopes? Surely there can be no harm in that," Jean pleaded earnestly.

"What will your Aunt Mary say to it all?" she faltered.

"She loves me; she will not ask me to be unhappy."

"But her Church—" persisted Clare.

"That is why I have not affiliated myself with it. The iron-clad rules stifle me. I will not ruin my life for my Church," he said positively.

"Love is the great new foundation of modern religion," Clare observed. "Why should we not follow its dictates?" And at the same time a small voice within questioned, "Why did you not do so in the first place? You spoiled your life, and Jean's too, by following after false gods."

It became very cool and they went inside. Jean piled some logs in the grate and soon had a cheerful fire sputtering away. They sat on a little bench before it, resting their heads on their hands, contemplating the various shapes in the bright coals.

Clare sighed, and Jean asked why she did so. "This is too perfect," she explained, "I feel so serene and peaceful, like the calm that follows the storm."

"Our souls are expanding," he said. "We are severing our mortal bonds and flying in the realm of true love; it is like untying the fastening of a fine thread—setting our souls at liberty."

## CHAPTER XX

"I NOTE that the number of divorce cases awaiting trial in London is growing at the rate of nearly five hundred per month! That's jumping by leaps and bounds all right. England is surely getting in the race for freedom," asserted Arthur Shaw to his partner, as he sat in his office reading an English publication.

"The door to domestic freedom is too easily opened in these days. That is why there are so many clamoring at it," his associate answered.

There was a knock at the door. "Here comes another seeker for liberty," Shaw smilingly prophesied. A clerk announced that Mr. Cornelius Wilder wished to see him.

"You are a false prophet," the younger man said as he left the room; but he was not.

"I have just returned from Paris," the visitor explained after he had been warmly welcomed.

"What can I do for you, my dear Cornelius?" asked the lawyer. "We have looked after your affairs just as we did for your dear father. We were so glad Jean did not contest the will. I hope the Trust Company has sent you your income regularly?"

"Quite so," answered Cornie brusquely. "But I am here on a different matter. I want to secure a divorce!"

"We were just discussing the prevalence of the germ on both sides of the Atlantic. The holy bonds of matrimony must have proved irksome," the lawyer ventured.

"Holy! I want you to find a hole big enough for me to crawl through to my liberty," ordered Cornie.

"What grounds have you?" the attorney asked.

"Here!" Cornie handed him the letter that Clare had

written to Jean on their engagement and the latter's reply which he had carefully kept for this very emergency.

The lawyer read them over slowly, "They seem pretty strong," he remarked judicially; "Will she contest the suit?"

"No," Cornie snapped, "she will not, I am positive."

"What have you to support these letters? They are not enough, alone."

"What would you say, if I told you that my wife has gone to live with my brother at his place in the Catskills?"

The lawyer smiled with satisfaction. "More than enough," he stated. "Have a couple of detectives go up there on some pretext and get the evidence. You will have to prove adultery—that is, opportunity for it. As soon as we get their report we will proceed without delay. As your residence is in Hoboken we will have to start suit in the New Jersey courts. Leave it to us."

"How long will it take?" asked Cornie.

"About four months," was the answer, "if there is no contest."

"Please hurry it all you can," Cornie instructed him.

"Contemplating another sortie into the field?" the lawyer asked; and added, "I suppose it is hard for a wealthy young man like yourself to withstand female wiles."

"Well, I don't know as that is very flattering. I really didn't steal my wife, but I am willing to give her away. To be frank with you, I am tired of looking at her. My love died when I first read her letter. I knew she had only married me for her own pleasure and what I could give her, so I took all that I wanted from her, made her my Love Toy. Now, I have played enough with her and I seek a new toy."

From the office of his attorney, Cornie went to a well-known firm of detectives and engaged them to get the necessary evidence.

During the next few months, he was constantly seen with Meta Murray, but was very careful to avoid meeting her

brother when he was with her. They were still friendly, but ever since the affair in Paris, which led to Clare leaving Cornie, there had been a coldness between the hitherto warm friends. Clay felt that Cornie had not treated Clare as he should have done, and Cornie knew that Clay would object to his paying court to Meta.

Meta was in her glory. Her pretty features seemed to be accentuated into a positive beauty by the glow of joy and love that had come over them. She had always cared for Cornie and felt that she would give anything in the world to be his wife. She was sure that Clare was to blame. She knew it could not have been Cornie's fault; and when he showed her the letter to Jean, and told her that Clare had gone to the latter, she loved Cornie more than ever, and pitied him for having been duped by Clare. Women are ever ready to believe their loved ones blameless, especially if there is another woman in the case.

Meta's attitude toward Cornie was entirely different from Clare's. Meta mothered him, petted him, and accepted his attention with profuse thanks and appreciation, as if everything he did for her was unexpected and a surprise. Clare acted as if she were only receiving her due, like the acceptance of favors from a vassal. She was the queen, he her attendant. While Meta felt Cornie was her king and she his faithful subject, her manner was not cringing, but dignified and almost Victorian—she was the queen-mother. Cornie did not feel as free with her as he had with Clare, but he respected her more.

"What do you see in me, Cornie?" she teased coquettishly as they were driving to the Woodmanstan Inn for dinner, one evening before his divorce case came on to be heard.

"What does the sinner see in the saint? The little man in the big woman? The statuesque queen in the insignificant runt, who has to stand on a chair to kiss her?"

Meta laughed at his quaint reply and he went on gaily:

"The society butterfly marries the home-loving book worm, and the famous beauty, the clown, while the dainty bit of bisque takes the cave man, the bull type; and the homely female cops the handsome manly fellow."

"Under which caption do we come?" she pressed innocently.

"If we could only see ourselves as others see us!"

"Well, how do you see us?" she quizzed.

"You have the dignity of a Joan of Arc,—and I—the demeanor of a Nero!" he added dejectedly.

"You are mixing your history," she criticized.

"My decision has been given!"

"You have elected yourself the judge and jury of our characters," she objected strenuously.

"Well, what comparison do you think fits our case?"

"You are a citadel, ever strong—I am a snow-fort, ready to be melted by the sunshine of your love," she replied poetically.

"Well put," he said, as he began to sing:

"The moon never beams,  
Without bringing me dreams  
Of my beautiful Annabel Lee."

"Who is she, another beautiful creature?" peevishly Meta sought to discover a rival.

"Only another name for your own sweet self," he replied, as he kissed her.

"You big baby!" she laughingly called him as she returned his embrace.

Meta, with unerring intuition, continued to play on the one chord in Cornie's nature that had never been touched. He did not know how it felt to be mothered, and had never lost his child-heart. His own mother having been taken from him when he was only a little fellow, he could not recall her affection, and there was no one who had ever taken her

place. So it was a new experience, to be again the little boy, and there was in his passion for Meta a devotion that motherhood requires, whether the crown be real or adopted.

She was inexhaustively versatile and constantly thought of new ways to pet and pamper him.

"Do you really love me, Meta?" he asked seriously.

"It is as futile to ask a blind man the road, or a mother if she cares for her child; for I have always loved you, Cornie, since I first met you. The heavens may be measured, the earth surveyed, but the depths of my love can never be determined," she breathed softly.

"I am not deserving of such affection," he protested soberly.

It was a new feeling for him to be humble and appreciative, but she so affected him.

"I have always worshipped the brazen calf of self," he bitterly flayed himself; "from now on, to make you happy, shall be my one purpose in life."

They were at the summit of their emotions and Clare was forgotten by both.

## CHAPTER XXI

"I WISH you could defend Cornie's case and get the decree yourself. I hate to feel that the record will show that you were the guilty party. He certainly proves himself to be a cad by taking such an unfair advantage," Jean complained to Clare after she had received notice of the suit against her.

"You know I cannot appear in the action, it would be suicidal to do so. This way there will be little publicity, and no details need be known. I do not want a penny of his money, and what do we care what the gossips say?"

"Only you and I and little Keats matter," he murmured. "Oh, that I could give you both everything; but my father saw to it that I was bound to earth, hand and foot."

"Perhaps it is better so. We can plan together," she rejoined.

Occasionally Rabbi Felsnik and Enoch Glynn would come up for a few days, and on one of their visits, Jean's Aunt Mary was also present. The conversation turned naturally to divorce.

"If people considered the effect of their actions before leaping, there would not be so many hasty marriages, and few divorces. You know what Jesus said: 'What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.' It is still the Law, and my Church abides by it faithfully," declared Mother Justine proudly.

"The trouble is, my dear Mother, that God has little to do with the making of most of our modern marriages. Designing mothers, vamping girls, and passion-clogged men are the cause of many of the joinders," observed Glynn. "If love ruled, such would not be the case," he added.

"What we call love is often inspired by ulterior motives;

and when the latter disappear, the former dies," injected the Rabbi. "When love has flown, is it not wrong for man and wife to ignore this fact and go on—continue to live a dead romance?"

"Our divorce system is making America the laughing stock of the world. It is poisoning our national life at its very source," asserted the Nun. "The only antidote is increased moral instruction. We must impress on our children and young people that marriage is a sacrament, and not a contract, or a thing to be terminated at individual caprice. The Church must give the necessary instruction plainly and firmly, both in the Sunday schools, as we do in the parochial schools, and to the parents from the pulpit."

"There are many more courts in this country with power to grant divorces than there are in all the rest of the world; and there are a number of places where the divorces actually exceed the marriages," Glynn informed them.

"Do you not think that the great trouble lies in our too ready acceptance of a change as a remedy for married folks' troubles, rather than the exercise of self-control and mutual forbearance? We need moral discipline in the home," was the Nun's assurance.

"We must recognize that there are causes for divorce. Even the Catholic Church allows it for adultery," was Jean's admonition.

"There is no question," continued the Nun, "that the great majority of cases could be avoided, and husbands and wives reconciled, if they were only imbued with patience, forbearance, and mutual tolerance."

"Isn't the irreligious attitude of the new generation one of the reasons for the increase of divorces?" inquired Glynn.

"No," answered the Rabbi, "I deny that the young people are irreligious! Fifty years ago they were more amenable to the teachings of their fathers than to-day, because they were more sober and given to serious consideration. To-day,

they must be approached in the spirit of the age. We try to administer the same medicine that was given to the past generation. Give them what they want. Religion never grows out of date, but it must be served in modern dress, just as the young never tire of dancing, but the minuet and square dance have been discarded as too slow and old-fashioned. Religion must be as up to date as dancing; and they are not incompatible either, for life is not all serious."

zClare had listened attentively to this discussion and felt as if she were on the rack, being torn to pieces by these inquisitors of the human relations.

"Take my case!" She brought them to the concrete instance. "Should I have remained with Cornie when he treated me as his Love Toy? I was really not his wife."

"But you should have considered what it meant, before you took your vows. 'For better or for worse,'" the Nun told her.

"Then I suppose I should always suffer. He wouldn't have children—now I never can—did I have to crucify myself?" she questioned with acid-like distinctness.

"I do not doubt that Cornie was a great deal to blame for your unhappiness, but you should have tried to overcome his erring ways," the Nun retorted sharply.

"Can you change a beast into a man? He didn't have a decent thought. Beauty! Beauty! That was all I heard!" she cried.

"Beauty is akin to Love," Glynn contributed.

"There is no sanctity, no beauty, in a union which has become a marriage of hate!" Clare exclaimed.

"The point is, my dear, you should not have married him if you did not love him. Wealth and pleasure will never suffice for affection," Jean's aunt asserted.

"But having made a mistake, must she therefore suffer forever?" queried the Rabbi. "A just God forgives, pardons. Shall we be less merciful?"

"We must suffer for our wrong-doing," the Nun insisted.

"Desperate cases require desperate remedies," said Jean. "I do not blame Clare. She thought she loved Cornie. He proved that he was unworthy of her love. I love her, I hope I may prove myself worthy of it. As soon as her divorce is granted we will be married, notwithstanding the Church."

"Love overcomes all," Glynn muttered to himself. "It is wonderful."

Cornie's lawyers kept the details of the hearing from the newspapers, as there was no contest, and the decree was granted to Cornie for infidelity. Therefore, he could still remain a member of his Church.

Shortly thereafter Clare and Jean were quietly married, and life once again took on its peaceful ways for them. To be a good wife to Jean and a mother to Keats, was Clare's only aim. She missed her butterfly existence, but gloried in her love for Jean and the little one. She finally had found a real haven in the Mountains of Love with Jean.

PART VII  
SHIFTING WINDS



## CHAPTER XXII

THE winds of Life blow strange courses. The hot East Wind of Passion, of Hate, carries lives into the divorce courts, and the brisk West Wind takes them back again on to the Seas of Pleasure and finally to the Mountains of Love. Shifting Winds—hurling men from the laps of wives to the embraces of mistresses—to the arms of virgins!

Clay was out of the city when Cornie called Eddie Philbrick and Jim Vanduyne, and told them that he was going to marry Meta, early the next morning. They hurried over to greet him.

“Marry in haste, repent at leisure, you know,” said Jim judiciously.

“We will have to make a night of it, to celebrate your intended lapse from single blessedness,” Eddie suggested.

“Here’s to Clay’s new brother-in-law!” Jim toasted Cornie with some fine old wine from the latter’s well-stocked cellar.

“Let’s take in some of the old joints, and see how they are behaving in these Prohibition days,” Cornie proposed.

It is a curious fact, in Prohibition times, that with their own cellars full, people must still hunt for and drink questionable liquors. There is a certain attraction about getting them in a clandestine way, that seems to warrant the taking of chances.

It was after midnight when they arrived at a place that used, in former days, to be in the midst of a bacchanalian revel at that hour. Only a dozen people were seated at the tables. At one, a lone pleasure seeker sat in a deep fuddle, trying to consume a steaming plate of soup with a fork. He was muttering about Bimini, where he probably thought he was still visiting.

A girl in a tomato-colored gown stood up at another table and shouted: "Who'll have a Horton?" referring to the brand of ice cream sold at the Polo Grounds.

People openly had bottles on their tables. Fresh supplies were secured by whispered consultation with the waiter, after which a messenger would appear with a package.

The jazz band played and several couples staggered on to the dance floor where they wriggled and gyrated about. Kissing your partner seemed part of the dance, but occasionally an obstreperous male would lean over and kiss some one else's partner.

A girl fell over a table, amid shouts of laughter. They picked her up, and when she was found unhurt, carried her around the room on their shoulders. She was their heroine, and her bobbed hair moved up and down. Several loud quarrels and arguments were in progress.

No one looked at the bottles, to see what they were imbibing. They consumed the contents without question.

Cornie and his crowd soon acquired some female companions, and the messengers were kept busy carrying liquid refreshments to them.

"Prohibition is certainly awful," said one of the girls; "I have to drink more than I ever did."

"The high cost of drinking is terrible," was Eddie's complaint.

"We used to say: 'Choose your poison!' Now it's true," remarked Jim.

"We'll go on to another place," decreed Cornie. "This is geting too tame. There used to be a dandy Inn at Westchester. Let's try it."

So they went where they could gamble as well as drink, and Cornie's second ante-nuptial night was thus passed.

After taking a shower and changing into his wedding clothes, Cornie said to Eddie, who was to be his best man, "It's a lucky thing this ceremony is only recovery for me.

You fellows have put me in no condition to learn a new part; but even a dying mule has a kick up his leg," he laughed feverishly.

The marriage was a simple affair. Meta had Tillie Freer as her only attendant. As they were riding back after the ceremony, the latter said to Horto Leaman: "Cornie had the funniest expression on his face as he waited for Meta to get into the car."

Horto replied, "He has the soul of a Romeo and the face of a comic singer! I understand they are going to Palm Beach for the season."

"Yes, unless Clay stops them; they didn't let him know until now. He is in Chicago. I wonder what he will say."

"Probably be delighted to have Cornie for a brother-in-law."

"I don't think so. I believe Cornie knew he would object. He sided with Clare in their trouble."

They all went to the depot to see Cornie and Meta off for the South, but did not notice a tall, thin, foreign-appearing woman who boarded the same train.

She was Lola Tuite, who had accompanied Cornie from Paris. Although earnest in his protestations of love to Meta, he had nevertheless frequently visited Lola in the tasty rooms that he had furnished for her in one of the new apartment houses on Riverside Drive.

With her foreign accent and bizarre gowns she attracted some pretty big moths with wings of gold, but was very careful that Cornie should never meet them, and he thought he was the only frog in the pond as so many apartment keepers believe.

She had a bee-like quality of constantly buzzing about her expenses, and succeeded in securing from Cornie several times the income that Jean received from his father's estate. She also insisted upon having her own way, and when Cornie told her that he was going to Florida on his second wedding trip she decided at once that she would go also.

So he had to arrange for her as well as for his bride and himself.

He planned to go to Palm Beach, and made reservations for himself at the Royal Poinciana and for his French mistress at the Palm Beach Hotel, in order to avoid complications. He thought of the old toast, "To our wives and our mistresses—may they never meet!"

Lola was not greatly disturbed by his re-marriage, as she said to someone: "His wives may come and go, but I stay on forever."

"Yes," her friend replied, "forever—until he meets your successor."

Many a man will hesitate longer about telling a mistress that he is through with her, than informing his wife that he is about to sue for a divorce.

As the train speeded southward Meta petted and looked after Cornie like a baby, while he accepted her pampering like a spoiled child.

Occasionally Lola would traverse the several cars that separated her from the newly-weds, and stand and watch them.

"What does he see in her? A pretty little thing, but not *chic* at all. What a wife I would have made him!" she brooded.

Finally the trip ended, the train slipped into West Palm Beach, then crossed the long bridge over Lake Worth and drew up close to the Royal Poinciana. In one direction went Cornie and his bride, in the other, his mistress. So it always is in life; when the separation comes, one way goes the wife and with her husband, while the mistress must ever walk alone.

"Don't give us rooms a block away from the dining room," Cornie growled at the clerk of the Poinciana, while Meta looked in the windows of the shops facing the lobby. "I have a fine suite on the second floor just over the

front entrance, that I think will please you," was the suave answer.

"Let us look at it—come Meta," called Cornie.

The rooms proved satisfactory, and after resting they came down, took a rolling chair to the beach, and went into the ocean for a dip.

At noon they joined the merry throng that always gathers during the season on The Breakers' porch, "to see" and "be seen." They met many of their friends, and Meta made an engagement with a school-chum, with whom she had learned to play golf, to try the Country Club links. Cornie said he would walk over to the Palm Beach Hotel to see a friend.

"I am so anxious to hear from Clay," Meta said hesitatingly. "I feel I should have let him know that we were going to be married, instead of telegraphing just before the ceremony."

"I told you that your brother sided with Clare, and would have made a fuss if you had. Don't you love me more than your brother?"

"Of course! But my brother is very dear to me. I sent him a letter telling him all about it," she continued.

"You probably will not be pleased at the reply you will get from him—I know him pretty well."

A few days later a letter arrived. Meta read it to Cornie:

"Dear Meta and Cornie:

"It is useless for me to say I am hurt and disappointed. No doubt you knew I would strenuously object. Some of my friends I know too well to wish them to marry my sister. But it is too late now—all I can tell you is that I hope you will be happy.

"To you, Cornie, I simply want to say that if I ever find out you have mistreated my sister, as you did a certain other lady, I will give you the most complete thrashing that any man ever received—and maybe I will not stop there, either!

"You cannot expect me to welcome you back with open

arms, but at least we may preserve the outward civilities that our relationship requires.

"Let me know when you get back.

"Yours,

"Clay."

"Well, not so bad at that," Cornie commented.

"Why does he blame you so? He ought to see now, by Clare's marrying Jean, that your trouble was due to her fault."

He shrugged his shoulders. "His threat was unnecessary. Very childish."

However, Cornie went to the Palm Beach Hotel and met his friend Lola, who was awaiting him on the wide veranda overlooking Lake Worth. She wore a flimsy gown, red with white polka-dots, and a big picture hat to match.

"How are you located?" he asked. "Room satisfactory?"

"All O.K.," she replied in the colloquial English that she had picked up. "You are going to take me to tea in the Poinciana Palm Garden," she added.

"All right," he returned quickly, "let's start right away." He planned silently that he could take her and leave before his wife returned.

"Oh, no, it is far too early. They do not gather until after five, I am told," she objected, "but we will go to your hotel and take in the shops. They are magnificent, they say."

"Very well." He visioned himself buying diamonds again, as he looked at her hands and wondered where she could possibly put another ring. "Unless," he thought, "she puts it through her nose."

So to the shops of the New York modistes, milliners and jewelers they went, and after seeing to it that he opened accounts where she might purchase what her fancy dictated when alone, she selected a ring, a hat, and a few accessories.

They then took a chair ride through the "Garden of Eden,"

admiring the magnificent palms and the overladen grapefruit and orange trees.

"What a wonderful fragrance," Lola cooed.

"Orange blossoms," Cornie explained.

"Very appropriate for a honeymoon," she teased.

"It isn't everyone would bring his sweetheart on his honeymoon," he retorted.

"And not every girl who would go, so there!"

"Well, I took you and you came, that ends it," he shot out rather sharply.

"Is my little one peeved that I should mention the reason that brought him here?"

"Let's talk of something else," he returned. The conversation was distasteful to him.

"The cocoanuts, look at them all about on the ground."

"We will turn here!" he ordered the colored bicyclist who was propelling them. "I'm getting tired."

They returned to the Poinciana and entered the tea garden, where the guests were gathering to dance and sip, in the prettiest setting in America. The tall stately palms waving gently in the breeze; the vari-colored lights intermingled with tropical plants; the tables heaped with red Hibiscus; the gardens all about, glowing with their bright colored blossoms—made a perfect Paradise. The dancers in their light clothes, the ladies in bright colors, the men in white, a most picturesque group, completed the wonderful picture. Lola and Cornie joined in the dances and the time passed quickly.

Meta returned from the golf links, bade her friend goodbye, and walked out on the extension of the veranda that over-looked the tea garden. There were several groups seated by the rail watching the scene below.

Meta stopped alongside a little crowd unknown to her, and resting her arms on the railing looked down at those seated at the tea tables, the jazz band having just stopped playing.

A lady near her pointed out a couple at a table in their

direct line of vision, and Meta heard her say: "That's Cornelius Wildner!"

"Which one?" another asked.

"The third table from the dance floor—he is that particularly well-groomed and spruce looking man. He is here on his second honeymoon," the first speaker said.

"Is that queer-looking woman with him his new wife?" a gentleman asked.

"I should say not. She is a very ordinary looking person, I am told. Rather pretty, they say, but not a beauty like the first Mrs. Wildner."

"Would she always be talked about as the second Mrs. Wildner?" Meta thought. She could not help being an eavesdropper.

"I guess that's his lady friend," another man ventured. "I heard to-day he has her at the Breakers—or is it the Palm Beach?"

The tabbies have here found their place in the sun! The past, present, and future history of every one at Palm Beach may be learned without the assistance of a clairvoyant or palmist. More family skeletons are dragged forth each morning to make a gossip feast than at any other resort in the whole country!

With a sudden determination, Meta rushed to the stairway as the little group turned and looked at her. She felt like a child, afraid of the dark, yet pushing blindly through it, trying to reach the light beyond.

"What happened to that plain creature?" one lady wondered aloud.

Reaching the foot of the stairs she crossed through the garden to the red-arched entrance; explaining to the gate-keeper that she was joining her husband, she crossed directly to his table. He arose as she approached. "Meta," he said, "this is Miss Tuite, a friend of mine from Paris. My wife, Lola."

"That woman who stood here was his wife, and she has gone down to meet his mistress! What an unusual situation!" one of the Madam Grundys exclaimed above.

"Did you enjoy your game?" asked Cornie nonchalantly.

"Very much, thank you," she replied lightly. "When did you arrive, Miss Tuite?"

"But this morning, Madam," she answered, and then bit her lips in vexation as she thought how foolish to admit that she had come on the same train with them.

"Indeed! It is strange you did not meet on the train—perhaps you did?" she half questioned and half decided.

Her husband scowled but did not answer. As if in reply to his unexpressed prayer that this strange meeting might be terminated in some way, a bell-boy paged him. He was wanted at the telephone.

Hurriedly excusing himself, he had to leave Meta and Lola together.

So the wife faced the mistress, almost on her wedding day! And she did not hesitate to open the conversation. "How long has this affair been going on?" she asked curtly and rather imperiously.

"Over a year, since I met Cornie in Paris on his first honeymoon," Lola admitted a little sarcastically.

"Did you ever meet the first Mrs. Wildner?"

"Most certainly—I was present at their final argument."

"Were you one of the causes of the estrangement?"

"How should I know!" was the laconic reply.

"You were there, you said," Meta reminded her.

"Yes, but much was said, many points of difference; they were incompatible."

"You must realize how I feel, to know that I must share my husband with another," said Meta, with a tenseness she could not conceal.

"In France we understand such situations; it is accepted—one must make the best of it. *Il faut prendre les hommes comme ils sont, et les choses comme elles viennent.*"

"Do you love Cornie?"

"I cannot say. I like him—yes—very much. He is so generous, so liberal, but he is homely, even ugly, and I love handsome men! He has a personality though, Madam, a winning way. I am satisfied with him. The time will come when he will tire of me; then it will be someone else; so why should we quarrel? Madam will not try to make him give me up!" she whined.

"Very true," replied Meta, vanquishing the other woman's fears as the idea came to her to make the latter an ally, to help her hold her husband, rather than an enemy. She would not let her elude her grasp.

"Let us be friends," she responded to the bold half-warning, half-cry. "We are sisters-in-love, we both care for Cornie." Then to herself: "Although your affection is only as deep as his pocket book."

"Agreed! Madam is indeed sensible. When you want your husband, and he is with me, I will send him to you."

"I will be glad to compensate you for your assistance," Meta could not withhold this unkind thrust.

Lola drew herself up with dignity: "Thank you, I could not accept anything from you. I offered my aid because I wanted to help you."

"Pardon me, if I misunderstood," Meta accepted the rebuke.

They arose before Cornie returned, Lola taking a chair to her hotel, while Meta went upstairs to her room.

She threw herself on the bed, exhausted from this strange encounter. Cornie came in. "I looked in the Palm Garden, did not find you, so knew you were here," he remarked carelessly, and continued, "Tom Lenane called me from Miami Beach. He is at the Flamingo. I do not know whether you ever met him. He is vice-president of the trust company that attends to my business. He invited us to lunch to-morrow noon. I told him we would drive over

as our car will be here by then." He ignored the afternoon's unusual situation and proceeded to dress for dinner.

"You better get started or you will never get done," he urged, in his experience with the time necessary to complete milady's toilet.

Meta slipped into a midnight blue evening gown with silver overdrapery and looked radiant. The excitement of the tea garden affair had given her a deep flush which was most becoming. They had dinner and then strolled about the long porches listening to the delightful outdoor concert.

Meta's mind was busily trying to plan her course of action as to Lola. Her nature abhorred an acceptance of the situation, but she faced the brutal truth unflinchingly. "Cornie apparently was not a one-woman man," was the way she took stock of the situation.

"Was it her duty to set herself up as a moral guidepost for him? If she pretended an understanding sympathy with his moods, she might draw him away from Lola. If she made the affair a gage of battle, what might the ending be? She would make him feel that he did not have to hide his *affaires du coeur* but could freely confide in her; thus would she become the one permanent, unchangeable thing in his life, while the others could come and go. It would be hard, but the mother role must be her cue, was her silent determination. She would make him the repentant erring child. Thus she might hold him. The halo of romance had already disappeared, the noonday glare of her resolution to keep him at all costs, replaced the lesser light.

## CHAPTER XXIII

LATER in the evening Cornie and Meta walked over to Bradley's, the fashionable gambling club, and joined the resplendent throng about the tables. Cornie said, as he seated himself at a roulette table, "Do you remember how you brought me luck at Monte Carlo?"

"Yes, and I will here again. Play the single '0', it will come!" And it did. "Now number seven." There seemed to be a strange unity between Meta's mind and the little ivory ball that brought a huge stack of chips before Cornie, until she glanced across the room and saw her companion of the afternoon, arrayed in a jade green creation, waving an enormous feather fan and literally shining with jewels. She was as languorous, as insinuating as the scent of magnolia blooms! From that moment Cornie started to lose, Meta's suggestions always failed, until she insisted that he cash in and stop for awhile or go to a hazard table. As he was waiting for his money, Lola saw them and immediately picked her way through the crowd to them. The large circular room with its high-domed ceiling studded with electric brilliants; its soft carpets and green tables, was a fit setting for the French Bird of Paradise.

"What luck?" she asked without hesitation.

"I have been doing very well until now," Cornie answered.

The Madame Grundys were soon busy wagging their tongues over this choice morsel of scandal. The men enjoyed the unique situation of Wildner strolling about with his wife on one arm and his mistress on the other, but he did not seem to realize the strangeness of his action.

Meta heard one man say, "He is untameable!"

How she came through the awful evening, she did not

know; but after retiring, she concluded on a plan of action. Immediate activity seemed absolutely necessary to her.

The next morning she took a chair to the Palm Beach Hotel and asked for Miss Tuite. Meta could not believe her eyes as Lola came forward. Her glossy black hair hung in a long braid down her back; a simple gingham frock was her attire. She looked like a girl of sixteen.

"Why—why," Meta stammered, "how—how young you look!"

"Thank you, Madam; we women are only as old as we dress." She chuckled as she made the remark.

"Boy!" she called aloud, "get me a box of Turkish cigarettes," and to Meta, "Let us go out on the porch, it is cooler."

Lake Worth, with its Venetian-like blueness and the distant shore line, lay before them. Graceful yachts were scattered over the water like huge white seagulls resting and sunning themselves. Meta did not see the beautiful scene, as she pondered how to say what she had in mind.

"You must realize, it is impossible for you to stay here," she commenced, abruptly.

"But, why? I do not mind."

"No, your position is different; you must see, that to me it is a degradation, to you it is a raising. Our places are not the same;" she framed her answer carefully but boldly.

"You are right, Madam;" Lola quickly sensed that she must not antagonize this woman; "what do you suggest?"

"We are going to Miami to-morrow. We will take you there. Cornie can see you when he wishes, it is not far, but we will not again meet as last night." She set forth her plan with such assurance that Lola saw resistance was useless.

"Agreed! I will pack and I will tell Cornie, 'it is my wish to go to Miami.' Will that please madam?"

"Yes, indeed," answered Meta as she impetuously took Lola's hand. "I must go now. Good-bye!"

She returned to the Poinciana and made no mention to Cornie of her visit.

Later in the day he asked if she would object to Lola's accompanying them to Miami, where she was going to stay.

Of course she acquiesced, and when they left the next day, they stopped for Lola, who was profuse in her expression of delight at the prospect of the pleasant drive.

On the way, Cornie suggested that Lola might prefer the Royal Palm Hotel in Miami proper, to the Flamingo at Miami Beach, saying that he had always stopped at the former place. His real reason, of course, was to get rid of her for the day. She readily agreed and they drove her to that hotel.

While Cornie went to the desk to secure a room, Meta walked with Lola through the corridor to the rear porches and admired the magnificent vista, the wonderfully beautiful tropical garden which extended from the hotel to the water. Tall palms swayed gently and bright flowers added a touch of color, while the beautiful Bay of Biscayne, with its blue waters, finished the gorgeous scene.

The beauty of nature seemed to make Lola talkative. "My dear," she said as she put her hand on Meta's arm, "I am really not a bad woman. I am a good Catholic. I never miss mass or confession. My life is my profession. Please don't think too hard of me. I don't steal anything."

"Only other women's husbands!" thought Meta, but this confidence gave her an idea which she was quick to put to use.

"Did you know that Cornie's Aunt Mary is a nun, Mother Superior of an Academy?"

"No, is it possible, I should love to meet the good woman."

"You shall," Meta rejoined joyfully, "as soon as we get back to New York."

That was her hope: that she would express just that desire, and perhaps the nun might influence her to give up her nephew.

Cornie came up to them and said that Lola was to follow the boy to her room, and that he was ready to go on to the Beach. Meta nodded to Lola, quite pleasantly, as she left her.

A New York acquaintance greeted them as they were crossing the lobby, and Cornie asked if he wouldn't like to ride to the Beach with them. He said he would be delighted, as he was going to play golf on the Flamingo course.

Driving across the Bay of Biscayne, over the wonderful causeway connecting Miami proper with Miami Beach, they were astounded at the new islands that were springing up, star shaped, circular, and otherwise. Their companion, who was a great Miami booster, explained that, "You could have an island built to your order in a few months' time. It seems the water is shallow, and so they fence in the desired size and shape, pump out the water, then fill in with earth. Later they plant full-sized palm trees: a mansion goes up, and before you know it you have a full-grown island home!"

"It is wonderful what they do here," marvelled Cornie; "and look at the finest yachts in America!" He pointed to several large ones moored in the bay.

Proceeding along the wide road, through an avenue of palms and bright colored Hibiscus, they turned in at the new Flamingo Hotel which rises from the edge of the Bay, a great yellow mass.

Mr. Lenane, their host, met them and said they would have time to drive over to Fisher's Beach and take a dip in the ocean before lunch.

They went back to their car and drove through tropical foliage to the beach, meeting many friends there and returning to the hotel greatly refreshed.

After lunch they walked down to the dock and looked at an aeroplane tied there. "I wish we could fly back!" Meta exclaimed.

"Where is the pilot? I'll see if we can," Cornie replied.

Arrangements were completed, and later in the afternoon they flew back to Palm Beach. As they rose high in the air they could see through the shallow water and the bay looked like a series of light and dark spots. They followed the shore line over the ocean to Lake Worth and circled over Palm Beach.

"How narrow it is!" said Meta as she looked down at the narrow strip of land between Lake Worth and the ocean.

"Someone has described it as 'six weeks long, half a mile wide, and as high as you care to pay,'" Cornie explained as the pilot skillfully landed them at the Poinciana dock.

The days slipped by quickly. In the morning they would go deep sea fishing or golfing when energetically inclined, arranging to be at the beach by eleven o'clock for their daily surf and sun bath. Here lolling beneath the sun-shades are matrons dressed, not for bathing, but for the "Golden Horseshoe" at the Metropolitan Opera. They discuss the good and bad points of the debutantes, who are the only ones brave enough to withstand the onslaughts of the ocean waves. From the beach every one goes to the Breakers' porch for the noon-day assemblage and dance. Meta and Cornie always lunched at one of the cottages and the former would then rest or play bridge while Cornie played golf or tennis, until it was time for the *thé dansant* in the Cocoanut Grove, the tea-garden fairyland.

In these hectic days Meta forgot all about Lola, Clare, and all the rest about whom she had worried, in fact the humdrum world seemed very far away. She knew that the several times when Cornie said he was going deep-sea fishing down to the Keys for a couple of days, he was undoubtedly at Miami with Lola, but they never mentioned that lady.

"I just love this afro-mobiling!" Meta said, as they stepped into a rolling chair with a colored attendant behind, and went for a moonlight ride, going finally to the Everglades

Club, where they had been invited to a dance, and from the Club to a cottage where they continued to dance until day-break. Then all the guests donned bathing suits and indulged in a dip in the surf, just as the tropical sun was coming up over the horizon.

Another evening they were at the Beach Club, as Bradley's is also called, where, after dinner, they followed the crowd to the famous back room. Meta asked one of the overseers of the play, suave, detective-like men, who see that the tables are supplied with sufficient money and guard the guests' jewels, "What do you hting is the value of the jewels that the ladies here are wearing to-night?"

"It has been estimated that they are worth one hundred million dollars," he smilingly answered.

"One hundred million!" she repeated. "And children starving—not only in Europe, but in this country, too!"

At last the great Washington's Birthday ball arrived, the crowning event of the Palm Beach season. Decorators were brought from New York to convert the ballroom of the Poinciana into a wonderland. The theme carried out in the decorations was Peace. Rising from a great bronze standard in the ballroom was a plaque with the inscription "*Pax.*" Trellises and arbors, flower-decked, and panels bearing the seals of the allied nations were part of the decorations. A gloria of international flags had a prominent place. At the end of the dining room, a great painting showing Mount Vernon in the distance, was imbedded in a border of tropical ferns and palms.

"This grand march is an event never to be forgotten," Meta declared, as they waited to take their place in it.

"I am the champion prize-forgetter, you know," Cornie bantered.

"Well, I will not let you forget me, I assure you," she came back.

After the big ball they left for Ormond, where they en-

joyed motoring along the wide beach, then on to St. Augustine to the great Ponce de Leon Hotel.

Here Meta noticed that Cornie talked frequently with a beautiful, statuesque, Juno-like brunette, whom he never brought over to introduce.

Finally she asked him, "Who was the lady you were talking to this morning, when I went back to the room?"

"A girl I knew in New York," was all he said.

She did not press her inquiry, but later found out that the woman in question was none other than the famous Christine Ives, of the Ziegfeld Follies.

"If I get rid of the Frenchwoman, will the Follies girl succeed her?" she wondered.

They intended staying only a few days, but Cornie strung out the visit for two weeks and Meta was convinced that the dark-haired beauty was the cause.

One day she said to him, "What attracts you to that girl? Is she a brilliant conversationalist, or is it her good looks alone?"

"She can't talk at all," Cornie laughingly responded. "I think her brain is a blank. But what a figure—what a face!"

"Tell me about her, Cornie!" Meta had made up her mind that, hard as it was for her, she would continue to play her role of confidante to her husband in his *amours*.

"You know that Beauty is my god," he explained. "I worship it. Don't be offended, Meta; you are a good scout to listen to me; your appeal to me is different from Christine's—yes or Clare's—or Lola's."

"Wives and mistresses, he classes them all together!" was Meta's first bitter thought.

"They all appealed to my love of Beauty; different types, but each satisfied me for only a time. My cravings, my senses, demanded them all. You are not like them, that is why I can talk to you like this."

"Christine has a wonderful figure," she probed deeply.

"I have her pose for me, as I did Clare and Lola. They were all like models to me—food for my love of Beauty," he boasted. "You know now and then I do a little sculpturing."

"Food for your sensuous passions!" Meta silently corrected him. "I wish I could satisfy you," she pleaded aloud. "If I only knew how!"

"Impossible, my darling," he asserted presumptuously; "only be sensible, overlook my failings, and we shall continue to be happy."

At that moment a wonderful inspiration came to her: "If they had a child—that might hold him! Their own beautiful child—that was the solution!"

She quietly told him what was in her mind.

"I do not want children!" he snapped. "Not until we are older, at any rate. I am not a believer in the creed that measures your patriotism by the size of your family," he sneered.

"But Cornie, we would be so happy!" And when he replied, "Meta, if I ever had children, I would want you to be their mother," she felt she had won the victory—and she had, as he added: "Your wishes may overcome mine, your happiness is all I seek."

## CHAPTER XXIV

BACK in New York, taking up the round of social affairs, Meta forgot her husband's mistresses, until Lola called her by telephone.

"You promised to take me to see Cornie's aunt, the good nun. Will you please do so?" she begged.

"Of course I will. I'll see her to-day and arrange for you to visit her."

That very afternoon found Meta at St. Mary's Academy, where she poured out to the nun her hopes and fears, and whispered of the little one that was coming, and how she wanted the father free from his entanglement with the Frenchwoman before its arrival.

The World Mother promised the expectant mother that she would use her best efforts in the latter's behalf. Meta reported to Lola that she could call on the nun the following morning.

"It will be such a pleasure to meet the holy lady," she answered; "I feel a need to be shrived by her."

Bearing no mark of her profession, attired entirely in dull black, Lola arrived at the Academy and asked for Mother Justine. Like a penitent, she humbly entered the presence of the sweet-faced nun, kneeling and kissing her hand in abject humility.

"Arise, my child," the nun said. "Meta told me you wanted to see me."

"It was presumptuous of so miserable a sinner as I."

"God's servants are also at the service of his humblest sinner," spoke the black-robed lady of the Church, giving the index to the soul that was forever voyaging on the heights, and still could see the depths.

"I am burning my life away for others, who care for me only as the plaything of the moment," the sombre-gowned woman of the world confessed bitterly.

"One who has no faith in others, shall find no faith in them," was the reply. "He who overcomes others, shows he has strength; but he who overpowers himself, is mightier still," she supplemented.

With her deep insight into human failings and frailties, the Nun drew out the sordid story of the prostitute, laid bare the lax moral code of her early environment, and the underlying religious feeling. It was like urging forth the tiny sprout from the seed. She watered it with kindness, nurtured it with understanding.

At last the French woman broke down and sobbed her shame and repentance. It was the Nun's explanation of the wrong that she was doing Meta, that led finally to her promise to give up Cornie and try to live a respectable life. Gently the Nun suggested that sewing would provide a livelihood, and agreed to send her customers.

"I did not intend to do wrong," sobbed the Magdalene. "It was the easy way that seemed rose-hued, and the necessity of earning my own living."

"My dear," consoled the Nun, "you have the same deeply religious spirit that I have, that is the central clue to both our beings. I had the opportunity to express my true self, you were denied that chance, and a false self took hold of you. The former did not die, it lived within you, trying to fight its way out, but the latter held the fort. The balance wheel between right and wrong is very fragile. But now, you have conquered. God bless you!" she concluded, with a noble seriousness.

"You, and my old village priest, are the only ones who understand me," Lola voiced the age-old complaint.

These two women, each the very antithesis of the other, met on the common ground of womanly comprehension of

the under-lying faith that makes women the chief supporters of the churches.

"There is no greater delight than to be conscious of right within us," preached the Nun.

Lola puckered her sensitive, intense mouth for a moment, and then expressed her inmost feelings:

"I never felt that I was doing wrong, until I met Cornie's second wife. I considered my profession as the equal of any other. In Paris, we have a certain position. But now I see how false that place is, how shifting the sands under it, dependent on the whims of a keeper—like a caged animal!" she shuddered at her own comparison.

"It is never too late to mend your ways, and if you are truly repentant you will be forgiven. Tell me, have you had many lovers?" the female curiosity would not be downed even by the Nun's garb.

"About a dozen, I believe. I never kept track of them. *C'est l'affaire d'un moment!* A succession of foolish men—mostly married who felt very wicked when they were with me, and gloried in the comments of their friends when seen in my company. They paid well for what they received. I do not complain—only I have sickened of it all. The recollection nauseates me. For the first time in my life, I feel really ashamed," she bowed her head in recognition of her feeling.

"Shame is the first step to repentance," commented the Nun. "Remember *He* said: 'I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance;' and again, 'He that shall humble himself shall himself be exalted.' "

"Is there really hope for so base a sinner as I have been?" was her expectant question.

The Nun opened the Bible, which rested on the table at her side, to that wonderful passage in St. Luke and read in a softly musical voice:

"Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are

forgiven; for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And He said unto her: 'Thy sins are forgiven.'

"And so He says to you, 'Go forth and sin no more,'" she said; and closing the book, quoted the concluding phrase of the chapter from which she had read, "'Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.'"

The sobbing woman rose, kissed the Nun's hand and stumbled from the room in a haze of tears.

After Lola departed the Mother bent her head in silent prayer of thankfulness for the healing power given to her, then rose and proceeded with her manifold duties.

The woman went back to her apartment, where she found Cornie impatiently awaiting her return.

"Where in the world have you been? Do you think I am your servant, to be kept waiting at your sweet pleasure," he stormed angrily; "and why the mourning? Who has died?" he continued.

She sat down without replying and began to sob.

He crossed to her side, his anger melted by her tears: "Never mind, I don't care, it's all right, but who has died?" he smilingly repeated.

"The Lola Tuite you have known is gone forever!"

He looked at her with a quizzical expression, and then realized that something within her had changed. "What has happened to you?" he demanded.

"I have spent the afternoon with your aunt."

"My aunt? Not Mother Justine!"

She nodded affirmatively.

"I suppose she made you feel what a miserable sinner you are," he remarked with a sneer.

"No! No! She showed me how I could be forgiven."

"Shut yourself away in a convent, I suppose."

"No—repent—repent," she sobbed.

"Oh, ho, is that all you have to do? So you are repenting in tears, and am I to be forbidden my own apartment?"

"I will leave now. You must realize I can not go on like this?"

Suddenly Cornie thought of his latest, the Follies girl, and it occurred to him that here was a happy release from this woman of whom he had already tired. He immediately took charge of the situation.

"This apartment is yours, you have earned it. I will make a substantial deposit to your account."

He rose and extended his hand: "Then this is good-bye Lola?"

"Yes," she answered. "God bless you."

It rather pleased him, this blessing from his dying flame, and he left her with a feeling of satisfaction at the ending of the affair.

He stopped at the corner drug store and telephoned to Christine Ives, that he would call and take her to dinner. He decided he would insist upon furnishing a more suitable apartment than the one she was occupying.

So do the philanderers close one account and open another with an easy transition—the elasticity of passion!

The next day, on the Academy steps, Meta and Clare met on their way to visit Mother Justine. They had not seen each other since Meta's marriage. It was rather embarrassing for them. The latter had always had a latent animosity toward Clare for taking Cornie away from her, as she put it in her thoughts. Clare felt a deep pity for Meta; whom she supposed was now suffering from Cornie's Beauty Cult practices, as she had done.

They exchanges some commonplaces about being glad to see each other, and went up to the Nun's office together. She greeted them without evidencing her surprise. Clare hastened to explain that she had only stopped in to ask her to spend a day with them very soon, which the Nun promised to do, then excused herself, saying that she had an appointment to keep.

Meta anxiously asked the Mother the outcome of her interview with Lola, and was told of the latter's repentance and promise to give up Cornie. Meta thanked Mother Justice for the part she had taken in bringing this about, and said that Lola had called her by telephone and asked to meet her. They had an engagement to meet in the Waldorf lobby late in the afternoon.

"Undoubtedly she wants to tell you herself about our interview," the Nun said.

"I feel for the first time that I completely own my husband," Meta remarked proudly.

"With some men, that is never possible for any woman to do. They are naturally polygamous, and restrain their passions only as the law, and a certain regard for the conventions and avoidance of gossip, demands. They want a good respectable wife—and a harem as an adjunct to their household," commented the Nun with her usual insight into the world as well as the spirit.

"Likewise, there are some women who are not satisfied with their husband's worship, but require the flattery and adulation of other men. And very often, these 'virtuous wives' nurse unacted desires that make them as guilty as their husbands," she continued.

"A new moral code of married life, of home life, is needed, whereby the husband shall be sufficient unto the wife and the wife unto the husband and the children the cement of the union," was her prescription. "Not a hermit-like existence, but a oneness of affection and passion. The wife should daily win afresh the husband's love, and not assume it a certain unchangeable thing. The husband must remember that the words of the marriage ceremony do not close the eyes of his wife to his defects or the perfections of other men."

"Men will have mistresses so long as wives do not satisfy their desires! The solution is, not for the latter to make

themselves like the former, but to so demean themselves that there will be no need for the husband to seek the former," the Nun concluded.

Meta left with an ardent desire to do her share in the domestic work. She met Lola, as agreed, with great confidence in herself. The latter opened the conversation.

"For your sake, I have given him up forever. We have separated—it is over—but beware someone else does not take my place!" she warned.

Impetuously, Meta leaned forward and kissed her companion.

"I thank you from the depths of my heart," she said; and then, as an after-thought, "Could you—would you—tell me any way by which I can hold my husband?"

Lola smiled. The humor of the situation pleased her vanity. "*Allez!* Give him a child to love, that's the one thing he needs. A little cherub, a true and lawful heir. No mistress can give him that!"

Meta bowed her head. "I am expecting—" she said demurely.

"Good, don't worry, the child will hold him fast; and don't be jealous." It was her turn to kiss Meta, as she rose to go on her way.

With peculiar feelings Meta greeted her husband when he next met him. A longing to have him all for herself overpowered her. She hugged him with a passion never before expressed, that took him by surprise.

"She has depths of feeling that I don't know about," he thought, as he recalled the light passionless caresses of the Follies' Girl.

"Where will we go tonight, my dear?" he asked with an affectionate smile.

"Can you get tickets for the Metropolitan? Caruso sings in '*La Juive*.' They say it is his best role. I should so love to hear it."

"There isn't any theatre in little old New York that Cor-

nie can't get the best seats in, whenever he wants," he boasted.

So to the great old Opera House they went. In the wonderful love of Rachael for the married Prince, Meta recognized her own love for Cornie, when he was Clare's husband. In that marvelous song, where the father expresses his love for his daughter, she sounded the depths of her own passionate love.

The humiliation of the Cardinal pleased Cornie, who said, "These stiff-necked churchmen who will not marry divorced people make me sick."

They came away soothed by the depth of the music and feeling very close to one another.

The months slipped by in a whirl of social affairs for Meta and Cornie, and a blissful solitude for Clare and Jean.

At last, the eventful time for Meta and Cornie arrived. As the latter paced the floor in front of his wife's room in the hospital, awaiting word from the physician as to how she was enduring the greatest ordeal that woman can undergo, for the first time in his existence life ceased to be a quip and a jest, and became a serious thing.

Her cries burned to his innermost soul and he doubted himself. "Was he fit to be the father of Meta's child?" he brooded.

Suddenly the door opened, and the doctor, with a solemn face, beckoned him to follow to a little sun-room where they could be seated.

"Very serious," he began as Cornie's heart almost stopped beating. "I do not believe it is possible to save both mother and child. We will have to perform the Cæsarean operation, and you must decide which we shall try to save."

Was ever a man called upon to make a harder decision! Even a Solomon could not avoid this! His wife or his unborn child! A god-like answer required—a positive decision!

"Is there no possible chance of saving them both?" Cornie demanded.

"One chance, but if we take that we may lose both—probably will; otherwise we can surely save one or the other."

"Terrible, terrible!" muttered Cornie. "Try to save them both—you must save them both!"

"My dear sir," replied the doctor firmly but softly, "I am no God! I can only do my best; but I would prefer to be sure of one."

"If you have to choose—then save my wife!"

"Very well," the doctor assented, and returned to the room.

What an eternity it seemed as Cornie paced up and down the hall! Scenes in his early life, long forgotten, hurled themselves before him. He began to question his right to fatherhood. How presumptuous he had been, after such a life as he had led! Meta going through hell! to hold him! Meta at death's door! But she would come through the ordeal, of that he was confident. Look at the millions of women who had done so! What was the sense of it? He should have insisted in his original decision not to have children—but she had begged so hard! and now—

The physician opened the door and called him. The nurse held out a tiny red bit of humanity. "A girl!" she said; "eight pounds!"

A weight seemed to drop from Cornie's shoulders. He smiled, looked at his child diffidently, then quickly asked, "Can I see my wife?"

The nurse turned away. The doctor looked him squarely in the eyes as he put his hands on Cornie's shoulders. "She is gone, my lad!" he breathed softly. "We could not save her. We did our best, but she had to give up her life to save her child."

"Gone!" Cornie echoed. He could not understand. "Gone?" he dumbly questioned. The doctor nodded.

For the second time within a few hours, life's reality became strangely apparent to Cornie. He staggered out of the

hall. He felt as if he had lost his own mother. Meta had been that to him. She was gone now. He had been untrue to her. He felt these others were mocking him, that they were laughing at him.

He brushed his hand across his fevered brow as if to put away these intruders. They were alive, and Meta was dead. How he had made her suffer! And still she loved him, and to hold him had sacrificed her life! He was to blame! Here and now was his punishment.

He could not face the future alone. He called his brother, and Jean and Clare responded. Whatever bitterness there had been between them was, for the time being, forgotten in the greater tragedy, as was also Clay's antagonism.

When the last rites had been said and their whole attention centered on the wee babe, it was Clare who suggested that she and Jean would take the child and raise her.

Cornie willingly consented, with the understanding that he would send a check regularly to cover the expense of a nurse and other essentials. Clay was very much pleased with this arrangement.

So Cornelia Wildner, as she was named, came also to the house in the mountains, and Clare took her under her maternal wings as she had Keats. How many childless, cheated mothers there are in the world, who take to their hearts other women's offspring and pour out on them a devotion as strong, perhaps stronger than the real mother would give!

Clare was happy and busy with her two wards, but very often bemoaned the fact that Cornie should have received all of his father's estate. One day shortly after Meta's death, she called Jean with a great cry: "My hopes have been answered! Look at this!" She handed him a letter addressed to Cornie in his father's handwriting.

"Where did you get this?" Jean asked excitedly.

"I remember that it fell from the desk in my apartment in the hotel in Paris as I was packing my things, and I threw

it among my other papers without reading it. It must have gotten into this big envelope and just dropped out now as I reached into that pigeon hole. Read what he says about a new will again." Jean took the letter and read as follows:

"I have to-day gone to Phoenicia, to the law firm of Beamer, Rohns and Kirk, and made a new will, in which I have divided my estate equally between you and Jean, with the exception of a provision for little Keats, of whom I have become very fond, and certain charitable and household bequests. I have found Jean to have an underlying common sense that I never suspected, and I have therefore decided to do away with the trust arrangement that I discussed with you."

Astonishment and joy were written in large type on their faces.

"You had better go directly to Phoenicia to those lawyers, and find out if they have the will," Clare advised excitedly.

Jean did so, and found that Mr. Beamer, the senior member of the firm, who, he was told, had personally drawn such a will, had died shortly after its execution, but it was reposing safely in their files. Its provisions were found to be as stated in the letter to Cornie.

"I advertised at the time," explained Jean, "as I thought my father had made another will; but of course I had no way of knowing where, as he never said."

"It is strange he did not put it in his safety deposit box; still, we have a great many wills left with us for safekeeping," Mr. Rohns vindicated his action. "Your father, not having been a regular client of this office, we did not hear of his death, and, of course, we do not search all the papers for advertisements of missing wills."

"I realize that," Jean replied; "but what shall we do now? I want you to act for me in this matter."

"Who are the executors of the other will?"

"The New York Trust Company and my brother Cornie."

"Can you go to New York with me this afternoon? We will find out the status of the estate proceedings and later file this will for probate."

They went to the city and found Mr. Lenane of the Trust Company, who informed them that Cornie had left the estate intact with them to look after, simply drawing the income.

Lenane got in touch with Cornie, who came down to the Trust Company's office and protested his ignorance of the letter and the new will.

"I am convinced that your brother is not telling the truth!" Mr. Rohns declared to Jean.

"So am I," assented the latter.

However, no argument was necessary, as Cornie readily agreed, after his attorneys so advised him, to give Jean his share without a fight. The first will was set aside, the second admitted to Probate, and Jean came into his rightful inheritance.

The several lawyers reached an adjustment of the accrued income, as Cornie had made several lucrative investments with part of his income, that enabled him to pay the agreed sum without touching his principal.

After the knowledge of Cornie's duplicity neither Clare nor Jean cared to see him, and on the infrequent visits he paid to Cornelia, they managed not to be present. He did not know that Jean believed Keats also to be his child.

Mother Justine took a great interest in Keats and said she was going to make a priest of him. He was growing rapidly into a robust lad, with a most inquisitive mind.

"This is the only real life," declared Clare one bright morning, "to live here in the midst of Nature's glories and to have in our charge two of God's gifts. All my previous life, my dolls were stuffed with sawdust; my life was hollow and tinselly; now it is solid and real—vibrating with life."

"Divorce may not be a desirable thing," she conceded to Jean; "but it opened the door to our happiness. My one misstep could have ruined both our lives. The decree set free the flood-gates of our life's joy—and our soul's delight."

"I feel sometimes," Jean expressed himself from his overfullness, "that I had suddenly touched some magic source—an Aladdin's lamp or a vase of Djinns to have all this happiness come to me; you, the children, and in my own mountains, then world goods enough! We have found Paradise, but we have both had to go through Hell to get here!"

"There is only one thing that makes me sad," Clare said.

"I know." Jean intuitively understood. "Your parents!"

Clare nodded. "We ought to make up with them! I know they must be lonely," she said pensively. "But I don't know how we can do anything without hurting their feelings. You know how sensitive and proud they are."

"Suppose we run up to 'World's End' on Saturday. They can do no more than throw us out," Jean suggested.

"Do you think it is all right to just drop in on them?"

"Sure! that's the only way to do it. These letter reconciliations are always unsatisfactory. A good cry and a kiss are better than the smoothest letter."

"Very well, let's make it this Saturday. It makes me nervous to think about it."

Mr. and Mrs. Emerson were seated on the porch of their comfortable home as Clare and Jean drove up.

There was just a moment of hesitation as mother and father each looked to the other to make the first advance, then both arose and walked to meet their daughter and son-in-law. Clare seemed impelled by an unseen force to find her mother's arms and mingle her tears with those of the older woman, while her father and Jean stood shaking each other's hands as if unwilling to separate.

"Two years lost, and life is so short at most!" Mr. Emerson said shaking his head sadly as they all found seats.

"Where are your bags?" Mrs. Emerson asked.

"We left them in the car," Clare answered shyly.

"I'll tell William to put them in Clare's room," Mr. Emerson said to his wife.

Clare found her parents older and sadder, their buoyancy seemed gone.

"After all," Mrs. Emerson said, just before they left, "every one must work out his own destiny!"

"Yes," her husband added, "sometimes we try too hard to force Fate to move in the path we have planned for her. We are not gods, we must accept."

Clare smiled at the new attitude of her parents. "I really believe we can do a lot, though, to aid Fate in her journey, if we love enough—"

"That is all that has kept us up," Mrs. Emerson said with a sigh, "our love and our memories."

Jean thought how queer it is that after one reaches the noon-day of life, love mates with past memories, recollections, softly fragrant and sweet; while in the morning-time, love mates with future hopes, ambitions, strong scented and pungent.

## CHAPTER XXV

SORROW, grief, remorse following Death's blast are borne on the wings of the cold North Wind, but oft times are carried away again by the languorous, sensuous South Wind, which, with its hot breath, redolent of the Tropics, whispers over and over: "Forget! Live! Love!"

Cornie sought the beautiful Christine Ives to help him forget. He opened a studio in Greenwich Village, resumed his modeling, and she posed for him. Leaving the stage to be with him, when she was not posing or sleeping, she kept him busy running errands and fulfilling her manifold desires. She decided that she would annex him to her household, adding him to Treco, her Pekinese darling, her Jap butler and her French maid.

Floating about in a peculiar grief which was more pity for himself than sorrow for Meta, Cornie was not fit to withstand the short, sharp campaign of Christine. However, he dutifully withheld marrying her until slightly more than a year after his wife's death, then the former Follies girl led him to the altar, or rather to the judge's desk.

Occasionally Cornie inquired for his daughter, but the mantle of fatherhood rested very lightly upon his shoulders. He was punctual in his remittances for her care and felt that fully constituted his duty to her.

At times, Cornie would ponder on his three wives. He remarked once to Eddie Philbrick: "Marriage has become for me an accident, not a conquest."

"You are a regular bluebeard," Eddie answered him; "or are you the reincarnation of Henry VIII or King Solomon?"

"I have proven," Cornie declared, "that Hope can conquer Experience."

"And while there is life there is hope," Eddie bantered. "I don't suppose you are through yet."

"Who knows what fate has in store for me? Now I have a Cleopatra—a beauty all right—but brains—" he threw up his hands in despair.

"I want to send some roses to a girl. Do you know how much American Beauties are?" Eddie inquired.

"I ought to know," Cornie replied, "I married one."

"One?" Eddie corrected him. "You flowery dissipater, you married a bunch!"

Cornie chuckled as he hurried home to meet his wife.

"Corn-ie! Corn-ie!" she called with her drawling voice as she heard him come in and close the door. "Bring me a cocktail! For God's sake hurry, or I'll die."

Like an obedient servant he prepared the drink.

"There it is, Christine dear," he said, as he placed it before her.

"I am going back on the stage," she informed him. "You bore me to death. I was offered my old place to-day."

"You are far from flattering," he retorted spiritedly. "You are the first woman who ever told me that! And the first woman who has ever ruled me! You decide what you want to do, and what you intend to have me do. When you care to, you tell me what you have decided! More often, I find myself doing what you wish without any previous information."

"Now don't complain, Corn-ie! and for God's sake don't remind me of the other women in your life! Heaven knows I am not responsible for them. Now run along for a while, but come back in time to take me to lunch at the Ritz, and stop in at Tiffany's and see if they have re-set the ring I selected yesterday. Pay for it and bring it back with you." Imperiously she dismissed him.

"I'm getting tired of this puppy-dog existence that my wife has made for me in her life," he meditated as he walked

away from the old Wildner home where she had insisted that they live, transferring her dog, her butler, and her maid to the new surroundings. Nevertheless, he attended to the errand and took her to lunch as she wished.

In the evening they were invited to a studio dance in the Village. The room was hung with red lanterns, and as Christine sat under one Cornie noted that her raven-black hair and eyes were in delightful contrast to the red lines that formed an aureole, as it were, above her head.

Oliver Wister, an artist, asked him: "What is Beauty?"

As he looked at the Juno-like face and figure of his wife, he answered, "Beauty is a gift of God. He distributes it apparently without consideration where it falls. It is like a painted vase—there may be nothing in it." He laughed boisterously as he helped himself to the strong punch.

"Well, that doesn't answer my question," his inquirer persisted.

"It is a subtle, baffling, impalpable charm, that will not permit of explanation. There are certain persons whose looks and manner seem to bewitch at first sight with an irresistible fascination. They cast a subtle spell, an inexplicable sorcery, that cannot be shaken off. Beauty is a hovering, floating, glittering shadow that cannot be defined, but only felt."

"You seem to have captured a prize beauty," the artist commented.

"Try to catch a butterfly; when you pin it down, its brightest colors are gone. When it is dead, its charm is gone. I have tried all my life to possess Beauty. I cannot help myself. I want to make every beautiful creature my very own. You remember Saint Simon of Fenelon said, 'It requires an effort not to look at beautiful women.' I cannot make the effort."

"My dear sir," his companion remonstrated, "you cannot possess Beauty, because it is life; and it is impossible for

mortal man to control that spirit which we call life. We can tear the rose apart, but we cannot find the secret that gave it beauty."

Jane Conway, another artist, came up to them as Wister made that reply. "Tell me, how did you ever manage to marry three beautiful women?" she abruptly demanded of Cornie.

"When Napoleon was asked how he won his victories, he replied: '*Mon Dieu, c'est ma natur: je suis fait comme ca!*'"

"No man can violate his nature," was her comment. "Are you happy now?"

"So happy that I have been thinking of Reno all day!"

"Reno, the Mecca for vacillating souls!"

"I suppose someone must keep the divorce pot boiling," Cornie rejoined carelessly.

"You radiate good spirits even in these Prohibition times. You are no hypocrite. You are outspoken in your views."

"I want to batter down the doors of dogmatism and take off the lid that suffocates mankind. Why should we be tied down to a dead passion, or live an unhappy life? We each have the inalienable right to happiness. I propose to find it, if I have to get married and divorced a dozen times! I found it once," he sighed, "but it was taken from me." He shrugged his shoulders: "You know the old saying, 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try, again!'"

"But what of the next world—how will your soul choose its companion?" the girl demanded, probing further.

"Was it Thoreau who said, 'One world, please, at a time?' I do not believe we will retain our individuality in the next world, but will be a part of a sort of happy mass. We will melt back into the great ocean of world memory."

George Fields, a philosophical writer came up. "What is the discussion?" he asked.

"Hail the male vamp!" Jane Conway cried.

"Which of his three wives will be his mate in the hereafter?" Oliver Wister asked Fields.

"Some poser, but the answer is here." He drew from his pocket a well-thumbed little Bible as he replied:

"Thus the Saducees asked, where there were seven brothers, and under the old law, the widow had to marry her husband's brother if she had no children of her own: and she married one after the other, dying last herself." He turned to a marked passage and read, "Therefore in the resurrection, whose wife shall she be of the seven? For they all had her. Jesus answered and said unto them, 'Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures or the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor give in marriage, but are as the angels of God in Heaven.'"

"Some consolation," suggested Jane. "You will be free again."

"I can never be free of the influence of Beauty. It entralls me and makes me its abject slave."

"You poor man, I wish I were beautiful, so that I could be your master!"

They both laughed uproariously and moved toward the piano where someone was singing.

All through the evening, Christine ignored her husband, moving away as he approached, giving most of her attention to a callow youth who hovered about her like a moth, drinking in her beauty and her mostly monosyllabic conversation.

Cornie inquired about her new attendant and discovered that he was a recent arrival from Nevada, loaded with his late father's wealth, which, as an only son, he had just inherited.

"She hears the clink of the metal eagles behind him; no doubt they make a much louder noise than my pile," he thought bitterly.

As they rode home, Cornie chided his wife for her lack of attention to him during the evening: "Don't you love me at all?" he demanded.

"I do not explain my actions to anyone!" she answered

haughtily. "I will not be scolded. Call it my whim—a notion," she shrugged her shoulders. "I told you that you bore me; George Carson interests me, and I am going to see a lot of him. I agreed to go to lunch with him tomorrow, so calm yourself—calm yourself."

Had she been timid or apologetic, Cornie might have overlooked her egotistical statements, attributing them to her love of adulation, but her forward, bold antagonism he determined he would not put up with.

In the days following the studio dance Carson was a frequent visitor to their home, and Cornie knew that his wife met him frequently.

Christine never had much to say, but now spoke to her husband only when necessary. While he brooded over this condition of affairs, he ignored it as much as possible, believing it was only a passing infatuation.

Therefore, he was totally unprepared for the surprising announcement that her gentleman friend was waiting in his outer office and wanted to see him.

"I love your wife, and I want to marry her." Carson began the conversation in a matter of fact way.

"Marry her?" Cornie echoed. "How can you? It would be bigamy for her, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, I don't mean while she is married to you!"

"Do you want my consent to marry my wife after I am dead?" he asked in amazement.

"Can't you understand? I want you to let Christine get a divorce. I'll make it all right with you."

"So that's the rub. I am to retire gracefully and turn over my beautiful wife to you, for a consideration, I suppose."

"You put it bluntly but correctly. I'll settle—say—twenty-five thousand on you."

"Well, well, you don't value her so highly after all. I should say she would be worth at least fifty thousand to you."

"Very well, make it that figure. I'll make you out a check now so as to lose no time."

"Suppose I don't let it go through, after I have your money?"

"I will trust you. Your word is good."

"Thank you! But what grounds could she claim?"

"I assume your actions may offer enough to satisfy the Nevada courts."

Cornie shrugged his shoulders and asked, "You will go to Reno?"

"My home is not far from there."

"Very convenient. I suppose I may have the privilege of saying good-bye to my wife?"

"Of course—but I should like to be present."

"As her future mate, you want to get pointers on a possible farewell, is that it?"

"No, but I don't want you to go too far."

"Remember she is still my wife!"

"Legally, yes, but you have accepted my offer, here is your check." He had been writing as he conversed.

"The deal is closed, I suppose," Cornie replied cynically. "My rights cease from payment and yours commence, eh?"

"Your language is strong, but you state proper conclusions."

"In other words, what I say is true, but you don't like its sound."

"Why not go up now, and be done with it?"

"Very well, I will be quite circumspect." He was amused at the unique situation. So the husband-to-be-divorced, and the husband-to-be-married, went to call on their joint wife.

"I have agreed not to try to bridle the lioness," he told Christine ironically. "I shall not contest your intended suit, but please be careful of my good name," he quietly added.

"Your good name!" she retorted. "Good for nothing!"

"Ah, my 'Golden Sphinx!' you have sold it back to me for fifty thousand. It was worth that."

"Fifty thousand! Is that what you gave him?" she asked her lover in amazement.

He nodded affirmatively.

"And I am not asking alimony! I ought to get some of it."

"But I am being divorced against my will. If you wish, I will contest the case."

"No," answered the other man, "I insist on its going through without any trouble."

"Then this is good-bye, Christine," Cornie said with a comic seriousness.

"Yes, I have my things packed and will move to the Ritz this evening."

"I suppose I may have a good-bye kiss?"

She looked at the third party, but he gave no sign, so she puckered up her lips for the farewell kiss.

"I hope you will be as good to her as I have been," Cornie suggested; "and please learn a few more words," he whispered to Christine as he shook hands with her.

He left them together and went to his club, where he met Eddie Philbrick.

"Congratulate me, old man, I am to be divorced!"

"What? Again!" was the surprised answer. "What have you done to the Venus?"

"Let her fall for a richer man, who paid me well to let her go. And the joke is on them, for I intended to sue for a divorce myself. The 'Golden Sphinx' was a very tiresome companion."

"You lucky dog, things always go your way."

"Not always, Eddie. The first girl I loved didn't care for me—she married me—that started me on my way."

"Well, you can be more careful next time. What is this, your third who is going?"

"Yes, my third. I am no saint, Eddie, but I think I have been more sinned against than sinning."

"Hard luck, old chap! But better days are coming, cheer up!"

"Have you ever seen my daughter, Eddie?" Suddenly Cornie thought of Meta's child.

"No, I would love to see her."

"Run up to Jean's with me to-morrow, just for the afternoon; it's vacation time, she will be at home."

"That's a go; when will we start?"

"I will call for you as early as I can."

They found Clare and Jean at home, but after bringing Cornelia to her father, they pleaded certain errands in the village, and left them together.

It was a subdued Cornie who tried to amuse his child, and proudly displayed her charms to Eddie, who declared she already showed signs of becoming a beautiful girl.

The necessary months passed, and Cornie was advised that Christine had been granted a divorce in Reno on the grounds of cruelty and infidelity. She had pleaded his all-night absences from home, and set forth his affair with the French woman, about which she knew, although that was a thing of the distant past. But there being no contest, the decree was granted on the evidence presented. Once again Cornie was a single man; six years had passed since he had been captured by the "Golden Sphinx." Just about this time after many years of courtship, Jim Vanduyne and Horto Leaman were at last married. Clay did not renew his companionship with Cornie after Meta's death, and so Cornie had no one but Eddie to fall back upon.

At Cornie's urgent request, Eddie came to live with him. Once again, the two pals, sole remaining active members of the old Heart-Mates club, plunged into the gay vortex of New York's Bohemian Life and for several years continued to swim with the fast current.

The idea had occurred to Cornie to have his daughter reside with him, but shirking the responsibility, he had put off

suggesting it, until after arrangements had been made to enter Cornelia as a boarding-student at St. Mary's Academy under her aunt's tutelage. Clare and Jean felt very lonely after she had left, as Keats, too, was away, being finally settled at Loyola College in Baltimore, and on the road to the priesthood. A close affection had grown up between the two, who believed themselves to be first cousins.

## CHAPTER XXVI

ATLANTIC CITY, a panorama of life! Walking or riding, all the country passes to and fro on the Board Walk by the towering mountains of brick and stone. The old Atlantic, twice daily, kisses their feet in adoration for housing the thousands whom she foolishly believes come from afar to gaze on her restless features and sip her salty breath, but who actually come to see one another.

Cornie and Eddie were frequent visitors to the "Nation's Playground" since the former was again "unencumbered" as he put it. On one occasion, when they were seated on the deck-like veranda of the Traymore, watching the rolling chairs, the people, the pet dogs, the ponies, and the airships, an endless parade, Cornie said to Eddie, "How have you ever managed to remain a bachelor all these years?"

"It is better to dwell alone in the corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman and in a wide house," was his quick retort.

"Eddie quoting the Bible! What's the world coming to!"

"I saw that on a calendar. It's good."

"I wonder how many bachelors there are in this country?" Cornie mused.

"I read an article the other day that gave the figures as nine million, according to the last census."

A lady who sat reading next to Cornie, looked up: "Pardon me, gentlemen, but did I hear you say there are nine million bachelors in the United States?"

"That's what someone, who seemed to know what she was talking about, said in an article I read recently."

"Nine million potential husbands roaming this fair land, with no one stopping them! I have had one, gentlemen, so

do not think I have designs on any of them, but when I think of the really wonderful girls and women who would make ideal wives for them, I surely am in favor of a tax against them."

"Do you know how many bachelor maids—there are no old maids anymore—there are in this country?" Cornie asked curiously.

"Want to know how many there are left for you to choose from for your next?" Eddie bantered.

"I can tell you, twelve million, more than enough for you gentlemen to choose from. What a pity the government doesn't run a matrimonial agency!"

"You couldn't get this old marital Bolshevik with any ordinary traps," Cornie laughingly declared, as he shook Eddie by the shoulders. "I think he has taken some anti-marriage serum that has made him immune from Cupid's dart."

"I am a revolutionist against feminine tyranny and autocracy!" Eddie asserted with a smile. "Pardon me, but above all, against the spoiled and pampered American Beauties. My companion has had experience, he knows that I am telling the truth."

"The truth, but not the whole truth," Cornie explained. "My first and my last you have properly designated, but not my second."

"My goodness, have you been married three times?" asked the woman, in astonishment, as she looked up at him with a new interest.

"I plead guilty. I have been trying to make up for these shirking bachelors."

"He is such a good thing," Eddie explained mirthfully, "that they pass him along. He is too good to keep."

"Or perhaps too bad," the lady corrected. "And you know 'Familiarity breeds contempt.'"

"I have been as much divorced against as divorcing, Madam, I will have you understand," Cornie objected strenuously.

She smiled knowingly; "Oh, these men, they are never satisfied!"

"Indeed, I am very well satisfied," Eddie told her. "If my friends would only cease trying to find a wife for me, I'd be perfectly happy."

"To tempt Eddie, the girl must be as beautiful as Venus, as rich as Croesus and as silent as—well, as my last wife."

"You have a corner on all the beauties. What is left for poor me?" Eddie returned sadly.

"Perhaps this lady can find someone to fill the bill." Cornie winked to her as he made the remark.

"I know just the girl for him!"

"There they go again," Eddie said woefully. "They'll catch me yet."

"She is stopping at the Blenheim. I am going to call her over. You wait here," their companion said as she arose and went to the telephone.

"I know someone who is going to slip away before she comes back," announced Eddie, jumping up from his steamer chair.

"You are not!" Cornie blazed out. "You are going to stay right here and meet the queen. I must be amused."

"And I am to be sacrificed to your pleasure, I suppose!"

"Are you afraid of her?" Cornie taunted him.

"I am afraid of no one in petticoats," his friend declared. He sank back in his chair, as if resigning himself to the coming torture.

The lady returned. "She will be right over—says she is very anxious to meet a real bachelor and try her latest vamping style on him. My name is Baker—I am from New York," she introduced herself to them.

"Mine is Wildner, Cornelius Wildner, also from New York, and *this* is Eddie Philbrick, from the same place," Cornie ended unconventionally.

"Oh, are *you* Cornelius Wildner?" She looked at him in surprise.

"He looks as bad as he is painted, doesn't he, Mrs. Baker?" Eddie declared.

"I am not handsome," Cornie answered, "but I don't boast of my conquests, like someone I know does of the fact that no one will have him."

"Just wait until you see Elsie Walden, she'll get him."

"I wish her good luck, believe me," Cornie said, as a sprightly young girl in a white riding habit came up to them.

"No one in petticoats!" muttered Cornie beneath his breath. He smiled as he said: "Eddie she'll get you, look out! She is wearing the breeches already."

"Mr. Philbrick, I want you to meet Miss Walden, a very dear friend of mine."

"Delighted—to know you,—Miss Walden," Eddie stammered as he accepted her outstretched hand.

"And this is the famous Cornelius Wildner!"

"How do you do, Mr. Wildner," she replied. "I am surely happy to meet you both. I have just come back from a delightful canter along the beach. It is so exhilarating!"

Eddie thought she surely proved it, with her rosy cheeks, and lips red with a naturalness that was apparent. Her complexion was as smooth as silk, and her eyes gray, like a dove's. Her small features were extremely regular and her figure slight and well molded.

"Doesn't she fill the first part of your prescription as to beauty?" Mrs. Baker asked Cornie, as Eddie entered into conversation with the girl.

"She surely does. Who is she?"

"Her father is the president of the American Metal Works, she is an only daughter. They have just moved to New York from Buffalo, where he made his millions."

"With Niagara Falls power," Cornie said.

She shrugged her shoulders. "She has money, what else was it you prescribed?"

"Well, silence—or shall we say common sense? To know

when to be silent and when to speak. You know education alone will not bring that knowledge."

"Culture, you mean, or an inborn knowledge to do the right thing. She has that also."

"Eddie's gone surely now," Cornie declared. "Suppose we leave them to their fate. Mrs. Baker and I are going for a stroll on the board walk," he told the others.

"You know, I lost my dear husband two years ago," explained Mrs. Baker, as they came out upon the walk. "He was such a dear man, and left me so comfortably fixed."

"Hm! Hm!" thought Cornie, "she is fishing, herself." He looked her over carefully for the first time. "Certainly no pretension to beauty, but decidedly *chic*, a charming manner and splendid appearance. She wears her clothes with distinction. Who was her husband, I wonder?"

"Mr. Baker was a great believer in insurance," his companion continued. "He had taken out a very large policy just before his death."

"What business was he in?" Cornie inquired.

"Vice-president of the Unity Insurance Company."

"Baker, the insurance man," Cornie said to himself. "I remember hearing what a tight-wad he was."

"Sometimes, I am very lonely," the lady faltered. "Have you ever thought of marrying again, Mr. Wildner?"

"No, well—yes! In fact I have decided never to do so again," he discouraged her.

"But why? Man was not meant to travel alone."

"He doesn't have to get married to travel double," Cornie retorted.

"Now, Mr. Wildner! I know you are a respectable man!"

"Respectable, yes," he replied, "but I wouldn't measure up to the late Mr. Baker, I am afraid."

"Why not?" she persisted.

"Well, I will tell you, Mrs. Baker, I think I was a Phoenician raider in some past existence, then an Arabian trader, an English buccaneer perhaps, and finally—"

"An American Philanderer!" she completed his sentence.

"I was going to add, an American husband."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I have taken that up as my life work. Do you know I am half-minded to try to win your friend from Eddie!"

"Oh, no! You wouldn't spoil that fresh romance," she begged. "Neither of them has ever been married."

"To the victors belong the spoils, and the race is not always to the swift, you know," he resumed with a preoccupied air.

"You seem determined to live up to your reputation," she blazed in her disappointment. "I shall do all I can to prevent your ruining that young girl's life."

"My dear lady, one cannot marry any person against her will in these days, and surely the field is not closed to anyone who wishes to try his skill."

"I shall warn her!"

"Do so, Mrs. Baker, but remember that warnings add spice to the journey, and forbidden fruit is the sweetest and most desired!"

"Mr. Walking Book of Proverbs, I suppose you also know that a burnt child keeps away from the fire."

"So you think I am burnt out! Well, I am going to try my hand at conquering the fire again!"

They were back at the hotel. Returning to the upper deck, they found that Elsie and Eddie were not there.

Mrs. Baker looked at Cornie in triumph. "He has the start on you, at any rate."

"Many a horse that has hesitated at the start, has finished in the lead," he replied with a smile, as he raised his hat and went into the hotel.

## CHAPTER XXVII

A MAGNIFICENT box of roses and lilies of the valley arrived at the Blenheim the morning following the episode on the Traymore deck, for Miss Elsie Walden. When she delightedly opened the box, she read from the card:

“To the Rose of Sharon—Lily of the Valley:

“I send her namesakes that I may think of the likeness of one to the other, every time I meet either.

“Respectfully,

“Cornelius M. Wildner.”

The implied compliment, the delicate tone of respectful adulation that the note breathed, caused a recipient feeling of appreciation, natural to any young girl. That the rich man of the world, with his many romances, should have deigned to even notice her, pleased her vanity. She did not realize that in the full flush of her maidenly splendour she was as choice a morsel for his satiated appetite, as tempting a bit, as ever made a glutton forget his fullness.

She hastened to write a reply:

“To the Cedar of Lebanon:

“In humility, the little rose and lily uplift a voice of appreciation to the proud tree, asking permission to bask in the coolness of his shade at some near time, to express sincere thanks for his kindness.

“Elsie Walden.”

He telephoned, asking that he might take her to dinner. She spent the afternoon with Eddie, who amused her very much, but she was constantly thinking of Cornie. The thought of conquering this well-known character aroused in her the excitement of the chase.

In the evening she impatiently awaited his arrival, attired in a pink gown of soft filmy material. "What a luscious pink and white loveliness," Cornie mused as he greeted her. He was immaculate in his tuxedo. "How would you like to try the Shelbourne grill?" he asked.

She nodded her assent and they set forth. The night was chilly and damp, the air alive with the tumultuous dashing of the ocean on the beach, and filled with the salty spray tossed to the breeze.

"Don't you feel you are wasting your time with a silly little girl just out of school?" Elsie questioned, after they were seated in the Grill.

"If it be wasting my time, then I want to waste a lot of it this way," Cornie answered smiling.

"But really, I mean it. Older girls know so much more interesting things to talk about."

"Interesting to themselves, no doubt," he grunted. "It is your very unconsciousness of your power, your beauty, that holds me. How old are you, anyway?"

"Just eighteen," she replied. "You see I am not afraid to tell my age. How old are you?" she asked naively.

He could not lie to this girl. "I am forty," he replied. "I know that sounds very ancient to you."

"After all, age doesn't really count, does it? I know some young people who are very old for their age, and some old people that are very young for theirs."

"I have always claimed that one is only as old as he feels, and I have always felt very young," he defended himself.

"Doesn't it make a lot of difference how we live?" she asked. "I think if one does not keep up with the times, and vegetates in one place, he becomes stale; but if one is ever on the search for new sensations, he keeps young and joyous."

"Well put," he returned gayly; "that is why I have married often. I get stale if I hang around alone, or with men—like Eddie."

"Eddie is very nice, I like him very much."

"As much as me?" he questioned.

"Oh, no!" and then she bit her lip in annoyance. "I shouldn't have said that."

"Why not?" he replied. "To be natural is one way to keep young. Why cover—why dissemble our feelings? I smile when I feel like it, and keep a straight face when I don't. Please be natural with me!"

"I will!" she said impulsively. "I do like you, so there!"

"All I am going to say now," he ventured slowly, "is that I am going to try to make your like grow naturally and simply into love, flower-like—as a tree grows."

She inclined her head, like a drooping flower, "And do you like me?" she asked, without raising her eyes.

"I would have to use the stronger term if I replied now; but it is too soon. I love candor, but candor without the will to learn when to use it, casts a shadow called rudeness, and I would not be rude."

The following days found them riding and walking together a great deal, but it was sometime before he again ventured on the subject of their feelings. Then he felt in a confessional mood.

"I have not always been, what I suppose you would call, a good man," he began in a quiet even tone.

"I hate goody-good men!" she assured him.

He ignored her remark and continued: "I have made of Beauty a fetich. It has been my religion! I could not withstand the call of a beautiful face or figure."

"And that is what attracted you to me?" she remarked ironically.

"Perhaps at first glance, but I have learned from bitter experience that beauty, as they say, 'is only skin deep,' and it was something else in you that appealed to me."

"Please tell me what it was," she urged.

"I hardly know how to put it, but I think I can call it

by two names; first, your Youth, and second your Femininity. By the first, I mean the freshness of your viewpoint on life; the newness of sensations to you; the joy of showing you things; and second, your *clinging-wineness*, if I may coin the phrase. I have been used to mature self-reliant women, and you awakened in me a fatherly feeling, a protective instinct. I feel to you as I might feel to my own daughter, if I knew her better."

It was this last remark that struck Elsie like a bomb-shell. His love to her was a father's love—not a sweetheart's! She had forgotten his years, but she could not overlook the chasm in their love. Hers was a youthful romance, his an older affection.

From the moment of his confession, she ceased to care for him. She looked again for Eddie, whom she had mercilessly side-tracked; and while for him she had no more than the pleasure of being taken about by any man, she did not want to be even seen with Cornie. "They will think I am an old woman or a temporary flame; I will not be his plaything!" she reasoned.

And so Cornie let a few days go by without attempting to see her or send to her. It was his idea that if she was beginning to tire of him it would be better to give her a rest. He could not conceive that he would not ultimately succeed in his desire to add her to his list of "Wives I Have Known."

The first realization that he might not be able to attain his aim came to him from Mrs. Baker, who was watching the trend of events with an interested eye.

"I see your friend Eddie has again captivated the beautiful Elsie," she said, as she came up to him one morning while he stood viewing the work of a sand artist, perfecting a figure of Lincoln stretched at full length on the sandy beach.

"I am not selfish," he boasted.

"May I be frank with you?" she suddenly became serious.

"Why of course," he said, surprised at the change in her manner.

"Elsie has admitted to me that her 'crush,' as she put it, on you, has passed away. She said she hoped you would not bother her further."

Cornie turned pale. He had never before been so addressed. With an effort, he regained his composure sufficiently to answer her.

"I thank you for being so blunt. I will do as she wishes. I will leave this very evening and not see her again, but please tell her that I really did care for her."

"I knew you would understand. We older people realize when to accept a situation and when to fight. If it is any satisfaction to you, she also said that your friend Eddie merely amuses her."

He did not reply, but took her hand saying: "I thank you."

She smiled as he went into the hotel. "An ugly man," she thought, "but with so wonderful a personality that one forgets his homeliness when with him. Maybe I would have been happy with him, but I doubt it. These kindergarten hunters do not make good husbands. I will not report this conversation to Elsie. Let the dead bury the dead. I will simply tell her he has gone."

And so ended Cornie's Atlantic City romance and Eddie's too, for it was not long after that they read of Elsie's engagement to a school boy companion. "Eddie, we were both too old for her," Cornie said when he read the announcement. "We must look to more mature pastures."

"I told you I wasn't looking," Eddie replied peevishly.

"Nor am I. But the clinging-vine type, that was a new one for me," Cornie agreed with him.

"There are still a few types you have not met," Eddie argued. "You will fall again, I warn you."

"Warnings! Bah! As well try to stop the ocean's wave as prevent a man falling in love."

"Ah, but falling in love and attempting to satisfy your passion for possession of a beautiful thing, that is different," Eddie protested.

"Well, we shall see—what we shall see," Cornie replied petulantly. "You'll fall hard one of these days."

"*You* must be made of rubber, the way you bound back every time you fall," was Eddie's retort.

It was not so very long after the Atlantic City episode, that Eddie said to Cornie, as they were having dinner beneath the stars on the Astor Roof, "My capital is running pretty low. I have had some awful bad jolts this year."

"You know I'd be glad to help you out any time," Cornie told him with some annoyance.

"It isn't a loan I need; I want an addition to my principal. Grand-dad, from whom all my blessings flow, has been getting tighter and tighter."

"Going to try the market again?"

"No, I am cured of that. I was thinking of a rich wife."

"So, that's the rub! Never marry for money!"

"You get more than when you do for beauty."

"Oh, but I could afford to take a chance."

"Divorce courts are as open for bad money matches as for beauty ones!"

"You can't make a rich wife pay you alimony!" Cornie laughingly declared.

"No, but you can get, while the getting is good."

"You mercenary man!" Cornie dubbed him. "But good luck to you, the rich ones are not all old or homely."

"I have a safe and sane body in mind."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Safe enough, not to have to worry about losing her, and I think, at least I hope, sufficiently sane to understand that, no matter what I may say, I am still marrying her for her money only."

"Who is this satisfactory creature?"

"Our mutual friend, Mrs. Baker!"

"Mrs. Baker! She is old enough to be your mother!"

"Mothers are usually very pleasant companions."

"Except when they tie their little boys to their apron strings."

"Every string can be broken."

"Even purse strings?"

"Wish me luck, Cornie, I need the money."

"You'll need more than luck to get her money. A crow-bar would be better for you to wish for."

It was an immaculate man who called on Mrs. Baker—widow of Albert Baker, vice-president of the Unity Insurance Company, reported to have been worth many millions.

With an ingratiating smile, Eddie presented himself.

The widow warmly welcomed him, and soon explained that she had no children and had been the sole recipient of her husband's wealth.

She sensed his desire to please her, and accepted with alacrity his invitation to dinner for the next evening.

He did not notice on his first visit, but at dinner discovered, that at times she was quite deaf. "If only she can hear my requests for money, I will not care," he solaced himself.

All of her portable jewelry was displayed on her person, when he took her to the Ritz on their second excursion. He could not but note the surprised glances his friends gave them. One met him alone the next day and asked who the relative was that he had out.

With some dignity, Eddie replied, "My future bride."

"Good God!" his friend exclaimed. "She will think it's her silver or golden wedding!"

"You remind me so much of poor Mr. Baker," she said one afternoon while they were having tea at the Plaza. "He always had so little to say when my friends were about."

"His thoughts were probably too deep for expression," Eddie declared.

"Yes, he was a deep thinker," she answered. "A penny for your thoughts," she said a moment later.

"It would cost you more than that," he thought, "and me, a rich widow, if you knew them;" but aloud, he said: "Really, I am afraid you will become conceited if I tell you."

"Oh, do tell me! I love to hear pretty things."

Eddie gulped. It was hard to bring it out, but he strove manfully to play his part.

"I was thinking that you did not look a day older than that girl over there," he nodded toward a charming flapper.

"You flatterer!" she said; but her pleasure was plainly apparent.

Their courtship was not a long one. Eddie was the most desirable of the little group of old bachelors, gay widowers, and flippant youths trying to marry her money.

And so they were married, and Eddie left Cornie's house and went to live in his wife's home—"hung up his hat,"—his friends commented.

Nothing had been said before their marriage, of their intended financial arrangements.

It was shortly afterwards that Eddie suggested the matter of his financial necessity, to be met with an unexpected rebuff: "Mr. Baker arranged his estate so that I could not touch the principal for ten years after his death. It's only three, you know, and it takes all of my income to keep up the house and clothe myself."

"Seven years before I can get hold of it," Eddie groaned.

"It is like pulling a tooth," he told Cornie, "to get a cent out of the old woman. I wonder what she thinks I married her for anyway—and you ought to see her in the morning!"

"The sequel of your love affair is not very cheering," Cornie commiserated him, "but nothing ever daunted you, Eddie. You will find a way."

"You bet I will!" he answered. "I have an idea now."

"Let's hear it," Cornie said.

"Well, she has a little Pekinese dog that she fairly worships. I am going to bring the cur over here and pretend 'Cutie' ran away. Her heartbroken mistress will offer a reward and I will conduct the negotiations for the return, pocketing the said reward." He looked up in egotistical pride.

"You'll not get enough to pay for your trouble," Cornie laughed tumultuously.

"She will pay ten thousand to get him back; you will see."  
"I thought she hasn't the cash."

"She has enough, that she had before her hubby died. I found that out. But she wants to hold on to it."

So the poor dog was sacrificed to Eddie's need and had to leave her happy home for a time, while her mistress excitedly told Eddie to hire detectives and offer a reward. But all his suggestions could not get her to raise it beyond one hundred dollars. So 'Cutie' returned and Eddie sadly spent the hundred, drowning his disappointment.

He met Cornie on Broadway one noon and the latter asked, "How's the better half?"

"Better half," he chuckled. "*Bitter* half, you mean."

"Is it as bad as that?" Cornie smiled as he said, "I thought the older they get, the more sensible they are."

"You have the wrong word again, Cornie. You meant *sensitive*—not sensible."

"Well, well, old chap, that is what you get for not marrying for love."

"Love! Hell! How many marriages are love matches? Very few," he answered himself; "other motives, not always money, but the desire for companionship—for a home—for children—mutual likes or dislikes—a passionate desire to possess what cannot be secured in any other way—but rarely love, cause man and woman to take the fatal vow."

"Most of them turn out pretty good, too," Cornie affirmed.

"It is more likely the love matches that will get into the divorce courts, than the other kind," Eddie rambled on. "The impetuous lover is very liable to fall for other women, and similarly, the moon-struck girl for other men."

"But isn't a love marriage the perfect one?" Cornie urged him.

"In novels, yes, but seldom in real life. The latter is so changeable that what the man saw that he loved, in his fiancee, often fails to appear in the wife. The attentive intended may become the *blasé* husband. Love is the hardest thing to preserve, usually it is the mutual condonation of the other's faults and the cropping out of unexpected virtues after marriage, that holds them together. Once in a while you will see a married couple where the wife is still the queen, though the years have turned gray her hair; and her husband is her king, though bowed with age. Even that love, I contend, is the result of years of close association, the development of kindred ideas, and the close tie that children make. I doubt whether the youthful romance could be distinguished in the later love." Eddie stated his cynical ideas most positively.

"Then there is still hope for you and your wife?" Cornie came back.

"Just like there is for the lion and the lamb to lie down together in peace and contentment. That woman thinks so much of a penny, she would haggle with St. Peter, if there were a price for admission through his pearly gates!"

The next time Eddie met Cornie, he was beaming with delight.

"Pray tell me, what is the cause of this gay mood?" Cornie inquired.

"It's all right, I have found the way."

"I assume you refer to getting hold of your wife's money?"

"Just that," was the reply. "I discovered that she had the

power to make a will after four years, and could thus dispose of her husband's estate as she wished. So she has made a will in my favor, which will take effect as soon as the four years are up."

"But she has to die first," Cornie taunted him.

"Oh, I forgot about that. Sure, she has to die before I get it, but she can't live forever."

"And she can make a new will any time." Cornie took the wind out of his sails.

"I never thought of that," Eddie brooded, as he walked away dejectedly.

At last Eddie gave up the attempt to pry his wife's money away from her, and began to neglect her. Taking a room away from her home, he started going about with other women.

She soon tired of this state of affairs and one afternoon came wailing to Cornie.

"My dear Mr. Wildner, whatever shall I do?" she complained. "My husband is running around with horrid women! They have stolen him from me. He hardly ever comes home and never takes me anywhere." She began to weep.

"My dear Mrs. Philbrick," Cornie mocked her, "you fail to realize the discrepancy between your age and that of your husband."

"What has that to do with it?" she asked sharply, as she wiped away her tears.

"Whenever you see a young man marry an old woman, or a young girl marry an old man, look for the nigger in the wood pile."

"Now what do you mean by that?"

"Don't fool yourself, Eddie married you for your money. You ought to have known that. You didn't give it to him, and he ceased to try to get it, that's all."

"If I thought he didn't care for me for myself alone, I would get a divorce!" she declared vehemently.

"Then you better proceed at once, because that certainly is the fact," he affirmed bluntly. His patience was outworn with this niggardly woman. "If you had realized that your money could give you your husband's company, and perhaps in time his respect, and had been liberal with him, he would not have drawn away from you."

She began to cry again. "I didn't want to be left penniless," she moaned.

"I understood that your husband's estate was so fixed that you could only get the income, so why hold on to what you had besides?"

"I was not going to have my money thrown away!" she blazed.

"Rather your money than your happiness," he retorted curtly.

She opened the purse strings a little, shortly thereafter, and for a time she and Eddie went about together, but more often he went his way and she hers, much to Cornie's amusement.

Since Eddie's marriage Cornie was left to seek new companions, and started to go about with a wild set of young boys who welcomed him as an old experienced guide to exciting haunts.

One of these lads insisted upon Cornie visiting him at his father's estate near Rhinebeck on the Hudson.

The family were seated on the terrace overlooking the surrounding country—with the massive Palisades looming in the distance—rows of Gibraltars.

"You were not originally a New Yorker?" Cornie inquired of his host.

"No, I came from New England, from the country."

"You are the typical New Yorker, then. He comes from the country, and keeps going till he makes enough money to get back to the country again."

"You are right, I was not happy until I had secured a place where I could walk and ride about and breathe."

His host's sister was visiting there also. Her husband was abroad. She was a very beautiful woman of about Cornie's age, and he flirted outrageously with her, but left at the end of his visit without a pang of regret.

His youthful companions led him at so merry a pace that he found it necessary, from time to time, to take a few weeks' cure at one or the other of the health resorts.

French Lick was his usual place of pilgrimage and there he went early in the Spring of each year. "To boil out my sins," he would tell his friends, and "to drink enough water to extinguish passion's fire." But the latter was too strongly entrenched within him—and in time the sins again grew—and passion's fire blazed anew.

PART VIII  
THE WHIRLPOOL OF FATE



## CHAPTER XXVIII

"CITY residences are really stop-over places for the few weeks that come between the seasons," Horto Vanduyne remarked to Cornie as they were seated in the lobby of the French Lick Springs Hotel. "Spring and Fall find one here or at White Sulphur; Winter in the South or California, and Summer at Southampton or Newport. In between, one must do shopping and go for a visit here and there."

"Most assuredly," Cornie agreed good-naturedly; "a real New Yorker would feel that he was committing a mortal sin if he remained in the city over the week-end."

"Don't you adore it here? There is an atmosphere different than anywhere else," she declared.

"I always like French Lick," he replied. "One golfs and rides, dances and gambles, as everywhere, but the difference is, that here everyone, old and young, do the same thing. It makes gambling, for instance, seem eminently respectable, if you have a white-haired grandmother seated next to you, playing roulette."

"Of course the waters don't interest you."

"To the contrary, I adhere to the rules of the cure religiously. I drink and walk according to Hoyle."

"But do you abstain from liquor? You know, they claim it will kill you, if you mix the two!"

"Well, I have always taken my little drink here, as elsewhere, and it has never affected me. I am still here to tell the tale."

"But really, Cornie, I wouldn't mix the kind you get today," Jim's wife advised him seriously.

"Since when have you become a crepe-hanger?" he asked.

"I am not a pessimist, but I don't believe in taking un-

necessary chances. You know how many people have been killed from drinking the poisonous stuff handed out by bootleggers, and how many have become blind from it! Don't be foolish, Cornie."

"My own bootlegger-extraordinary and purveyor to his majesty, Myself, has assured me that the stuff I get from him could not be worse," Cornie replied ironically.

But he recalled Horto's warning, when, after he had left Brown's, the popular gambling club, with a party of gentlemen, and had partaken of a plentiful supply of whiskey that one of the party brought forth during a protracted poker game, he felt a sinking sensation and became very dizzy. He managed to get to his room; then called the house physician, and told him what he had been drinking. The doctor sent down for a sample for analysis. Cornie became very sick and each succeeding day noticed that his sight seemed to be growing dimmer and dimmer. Finally he lost it completely.

The chemist reported that the sample of liquor was almost pure wood alcohol, and the doctor held that either that of itself, or mixing it with the Spring water, had caused Cornie's blindness.

Slowly he recovered his health but not his sight. For one whose greatest delight was to admire beautiful women, it was the height of torture to be unable to see. The doctors held out hope that with complete rest and quiet there was a possibility that he might in time see again but were very doubtful.

Eddie came and took him back to New York. The numerous specialists consulted could not help him but suggested the mountain air.

Eddie, of his own accord, notified Jean of his brother's predicament and the latter came at once. He overpowered his hard feelings toward Cornie, and insisted upon taking him to "Soul's Desire." He could not refuse his brother's call when he needed him.

In the quiet of the Catskills Cornie had time to ponder on the strange current of his life. Here he was, after having had three wives, dependent on his brother and his first wife, now his brother's, for care and comfort!

Clare had no other feeling than that of pity for him, and Jean felt again a brotherly affection. The years had worn out the resentment that both had toward him.

Many were the confidential talks that the three had together:

"We lead a very placid and calm life here," Jean said one evening shortly after Cornie's arrival.

"I could never be happy here, I live on excitement," his brother admitted. "I seek always those charming shocks that the sight of a beautiful woman brings; that gratifying human experience that her presence gives; in a word, I must have constantly new sensations."

"You believe in action, Cornie," Clare stated, "Jean and I, in contemplation."

"You used to like pretty swift going yourself," Cornie reminded her.

"I know I did, but I found that by action only you permit your facilities of appreciation to grow prematurely old. Your senses will not stand constant jars; they become atrophied, hardened and not sensitive to anything else. The world of thought and the philosophy of life, all the different planes than outward bodily beauty, are hidden below the rhinoceros hide of your Beauty Cult! They cannot be penetrated to and are non-existent for you," she preached.

"I understand. Just as I cannot see you, or appreciate beauty now, so before, I could see nothing else," he conceded.

Clare was somewhat nonplused by his concrete example.

"Man's senses are always the same," Jean contributed. "But so many are to-day one-sided in their use of them. I myself am too contemplative and not active enough."

"You are an exception," Cornie said. "We have become a nation of doers and ceased to be thinkers."

"Without thought," Clare explained, "action is meaningless."

"The war had a great deal to do with it," Jean added. "We were so active that we had no time to think of the great verities of life. We were primitive savages again, without thought of more than our daily existence."

"I suppose our good aunt, Mother Justine, will say this blindness has come to me as a penalty for my wicked life," Cornie said rather peevishly.

Clare did not know just what to reply, for this very thought had come to her. No other thing than the inability to see the Beauty that he had always worshipped, could be expected to impress on Cornie the futility, the evanescence of his cult. While she sought for something to say, Jean exclaimed, "You brought on your present condition yourself. If you had not taken that liquor, it would not have happened."

"Well, I suppose Aunt Mary will think that Satan made me take it," he persisted.

"Here comes someone!" Clare interrupted, as a car turned into the road leading to "Soul's Desire."

"It's Nate and Enoch!" Jean shouted as it drew nearer.

"Hello, there!" he called; and as they came up on the porch, "You know Cornie,—this is Rabbi Felsnik and Enoch Glynn."

"Glad to meet you again, gentlemen. I cannot say to see you."

"So sorry about it, old man," Glynn commiserated. "But it will all come out all right. Things always do."

"Except when they don't," Cornie smiled as he replied.

"Well, we have to take the hard with the easy, I suppose," interjected the Rabbi. "If life were all pleasure, we would not appreciate it as we should."

"We never really appreciate what blessings we have, until we lose them," Cornie sanctioned his views.

"Very true, we live too much from day to day; a hand to mouth existence; take things as they come," asserted Glynn.

"And when we have concluded an episode in our lives, we like to think that we can seal it up like an envelope and lay it away in our memory until we are ready to call it forth; but like an aching tooth, nothing we have ever done can really be forgotten, because it has become a part of ourselves," the Rabbi set forth. "You should be thankful that you can draw on your memory to keep visions before your eyes."

"And such sights, eh, Mr. Wildner?" Glynn bellowed as he gave him a dig in the ribs. "I know you always were a great admirer of beautiful women."

"That only makes it harder to bear," Cornie replied sadly. "It is no act of piety for a weak, feeble man, with no appetite, to fast; nor is it hard for one who never saw Beauty, to have his sight taken away. A beautiful woman is sunlight to the eye and honey to the palate."

"Everyone admires Beauty," Clare stated concisely, "but it is not all, it is merely the outward expression. Just as we were saying when you gentlemen came, we are to-day too active and not contemplative enough; that is, all but my husband. The Beauty Cult is an active thing. You remember, Cornie, I called your crowd the Heart-Mates. It lives while the heart beats. Jean and his friends were Soul-Mates. They lived in an ethereal element, a thoughtful plane. And thought needs no heart beat, it goes on from generation to generation."

"The sight of a beautiful woman," Cornie ignored Clare's interruption, "affected me as burning coal does frozen water, when dropped into a goblet filled with it."

"I think Cornie, a better comparison," Clare jeered at him,

"is that you were a lion longing to tear the martyr to Beauty into shreds with the claws of your sensuous desires."

"There's a hot one!" Glynn shouted.

Cornie shrugged his shoulders expressively. "My cult, as you call it, is not a new one. The ancient Greeks understood the value of Beauty. It has an ageless allure."

"But you must realize that Beauty and Brains do not always travel together," Glynn said sonorously. "One cannot live on Beauty alone."

"To the contrary," the Rabbi replied, "many not only live on Beauty but by beauty as well."

"I am certain from my own 'Golden Sphinx,' that a silent beauty is also not all to be desired," was Cornie's concession.

"Your Golden Sphinx?" the Rabbi said quizzically.

"My last wife, Christine Ives, of the Follies," Cornie explained.

"Oh, I see," said the Rabbi; "silence is golden, but you prefer talkative brass."

"What do you say to a little walk?" Glynn inquired of Cornie. He thought the conversation was drifting into too dangerous channels when the latter's wives became the topic, especially in the presence of a former one and her present husband.

Cornie replied in the affirmative and Glynn took him by the arm and led him away.

After they had left, the Rabbi said to Clare and Jean, "What a dreadful pity to be so afflicted. Do the physicians give any hope?"

"It seems only nature can help him. Time alone will tell," Jean answered.

"I have no doubt that with his passionate love of Beauty, it was the one thing he feared. Is it not strange that so often the very thing we fear most, is the one thing that happens to us?"

"I suppose that is why the Scientists eliminate fear," Clare speculated.

"But they have not driven away disease or death, they merely meet them in an optimistic way instead of with our usual pessimism," was Jean's response.

"It proves what an illusion Cornie's ideas were. He has nothing to fall back on but the remembrance, the mental pictures of his beauties. His education he used only to appear clever, never for deep constructive thinking. He broods constantly over his loss of sight," Clare sympathized.

"But even his earthly visions are something," the Rabbi stated.

Toward evening the Rabbi and Glynn returned to the city. The Scientist had tried to turn Cornie's thoughts to his belief, but the latter could not understand that universal love which is its basis. Love, to him, spelt passion; and the phrase, "God is love," was meaningless.

A few days later a long distance telephone call came from Mother Justine, inquiring if Cornelia had come home.

"Why no!" Jean replied. "Cornelia isn't here—isn't she at school?" He did not think of his brother being within earshot.

The Mother explained that Cornelia had gone downtown with several students under a nun's chaperonage, to do some necessary shopping, but had not returned with them.

Cornie had felt his way to Jean. "What is it?" He insisted upon knowing the message. "Tell me what about Cornelia—I heard you say she wasn't here—where is she?"

"Just wait a minute," Jean told him, "until I hear what Aunt Mary has to say."

"Cornelia asked permission to go into a drugstore they were passing, to get some toothpaste. The others waited outside. When she did not come out within a reasonable time, the nun went in and found Cornelia was not there. It seems the store had two exits, one on another street than where they were waiting. Apparently she had gone out that way. All they could do was to return without her."

"When did this happen?" Jean asked.

"Yesterday afternoon. I thought she probably had gone home, or to some friends, but when I did not hear from her this morning, I thought it best to call you."

"Then you haven't any idea where she is now!" Jean's voice quivered with the emotion he felt. His little girl was gone! He could not withhold the exclamation. The words were hardly out of his mouth before he thought of their possible effect on her father. He swung around and saw Cornie swaying back and forth. His grip on the back of a chair was all that was keeping him from falling. All his strength seemed to have left him.

Dropping the receiver Jean ran to Cornie's side and taking hold of him called: "Clare! Clare! Come quick!"

"What is the matter?" she asked as she came running.

"Cornelia's lost! My God! Cornelia's lost!" was all Cornie could say as Clare gently forced him into a chair.

"All right, Aunt Mary. I called Clare to look after Cornie. He overheard and naturally is upset," explained Jean over the phone.

"I hope nothing has happened to the poor girl. I can't imagine where she can be, or believe that she would stay away of her own accord," the Mother continued.

"Well, there is no use conjuring up things. I'll go into the city at once, and after I have notified the police I'll run out and see you."

"For Heaven's sake, what's happened?" Clare asked with a frightened catch in her voice.

"Cornelia has been away from school since yesterday afternoon," Jean said, and then repeated to them both what the Mother had told him.

"I'll go into the city now—report to the police, and engage a good detective to get busy right off. They'll find her. She may only be with some friends."

Clare was quietly sobbing. Cornelia was as dear to her as if she had been her own child.

Jean went over and put his arm about her. "Now be sensible," he whispered; "we must keep up for *his* sake," pointing to the blind man.

Cornie sat stunned. "I'm helpless," he said finally. "I'm useless, I might as well be dead! I can't even help to look for my own child; and believe me, I know what a beautiful young girl all alone in New York is up against, too!"

Clare shuddered, "Had she been kidnapped, or lured away to become one of the nameless thousands who each year disappear from view as if swallowed by the earth?" was the fearful thought that raced madly through her brain.

"What can I do?" Cornie asked wearily.

"I'll phone you as soon as I hear anything," Jean told him. "You keep a stiff upper lip—that's your job."

Jean reported the disappearance to the police, engaged a great detective to work on the case, and then with one of the latter's men visited the drugstore and Aunt Mary, but no further information could be obtained and he returned thoroughly discouraged.

Daily reports were received from the detective, but the days slipped by without any word of encouragement.

Cornie was beside himself with grief. It seemed that his own affliction gave him time to consider how he had shirked the duties of fatherhood, which he had slipped from under as one does from a loose coat, casting them upon Clare and Jean. He had proven faithless to Meta, whom in his innermost being he felt was his only real wife, the only one who had evoked responding affection. Now, he was helpless to aid his child—her child!

He paced the verandah like a caged animal. "'Nelia was just eighteen," he thought, "an age when a girl appears far more matured than she actually is." He recalled Elsie Walden's response to his addresses. "Eighteen is an impressionable age; her youthful, sparkling beauty would attract men, as a drop of honey calls many flies," were his troubled thoughts.

At night he would lie sleepless, pondering over the place where she might be. He knew the by-paths of New York Bohemian life; the inmost recesses of Greenwich Village; the hidden resorts on the little side streets off the bowery, as well as the blatant, open places of night life, but he couldn't explain to anyone how only a certain taxi driver knew the road to one place and that someone else had to direct you to another.

And then suddenly, one day, as he sat in the sunlight, a flicker penetrated his sight! At first he did not know what had come over him. When he realized that he could distinguish light even the least bit, he cried out in a manner that brought everyone in the house to him.

"I can see! I can see! Now I can search for my daughter!"

But it was many long, weary weeks before his gradually increasing vision grew to the point where he could distinguish objects, and finally became so that he could go about by himself. The oculists said that the fresh mountain air, the absolute quiet, and more than all else the urge, the incentive to find his daughter, had all assisted Nature in overcoming the poison that had taken away his sight.

As soon as he was able to do so he set out to aid in the search. Every few days he would call Jean to inquire if he had any news, but he did not return to "Soul's Desire" for many months.

Day and night he ceaselessly continued his hunt, assisted from time to time by his brother.

He was positive that she was being held somewhere against her will, and so sought all possible avenues of information to the underworld, but in vain.

Then the thought would come to him that perhaps his daughter had inherited some of his own unruly tendencies, unholy desires. "God knows where she is or how low she has fallen! Meta, I have been unfaithful to you! I de-

serted your child. Oh, that I had been true to you—to our little one!" was his troubled thought.

## CHAPTER XXIX

CORNELIA WILDNER at eighteen was an inverted picture of her father. Whereas he loved beauty as it appeared to him, she was the concrete evidence of that beauty. All his passionate desire to grasp and hold the beauty of women seemed transferred to her in an actual appreciation of her own blossoming fairness. She realized her attractiveness, not in an egotistical or vain way, but in the spirit of enjoying the praise that looking at her caused others to give. She was never so happy as when posing, an amusement which she proposed so often that the girls had nicknamed her, "'Nelia, the living picture." While outwardly modest, she knew no shame in exhibiting her perfect figure to her girl chums in the privacy of their rooms. Before the day she was missed, she had expressed many times to these friends her desire to see the world. Reading in one of the Sunday supplements the life story of Audrey Munson, "The world's most perfect model," she had become imbued with the idea that if only she could get the opportunity, she would outshine this star.

These facts 'Nelia's school companions were afraid to tell the sisters, for fear of exposing their own wrong doing in enjoying the forbidden papers and room entertainments. They would never have become known had not a lady operative of the detective hired by Jean asked Mother Justine's permission to interview Cornelia's girl companions.

The necessary consent being obtained, she succeeded in getting the information that the nuns had been unable to secure. So it was that 'Nelia's longing to be an artist's model, and her predilection for posing, were discovered.

Hearing these things, Cornie conceived the idea that she

might have become an artist's model. He again opened his old studio, just off Washington Square, which he had left untouched since he had acquired the old house in which it was located, and re-entered the Bohemian life of Greenwich Village, hoping to find some word of his daughter.

It was from an old studio acquaintance that he first heard of the beautiful new model who was astonishing the sculptors and painters of the Village with her freshness and piquancy of beauty and perfection of figure. From studio to studio he travelled, walking in on many men and women at work in the Bohemian custom, which leaves the door opened or unlatched, even where models are posing in "the altogether," hunting for her with the hope that she might be his daughter.

One morning, opening quietly the studio door of an old friend—a man about his own age—he saw posing as Psyche, his own child!

He hesitated: how should he approach her—how win her back? This was not the place nor the manner in which he had thought to discover her. He had imagined himself fighting to release her from her captors, and here she stood free to go!

He stood silently staring at her until the sculptor gave the signal to rest and turned to him.

"Well, if I never——" Before the man could say anything further, Cornie advanced to him. "Could I speak to you privately, Joe?"

The man addressed recognized the agitation of his visitor—who unsteadily sought a chair.

Without comment the sculptor took out his watch, glanced at it, then said to the model: "That will be all for this morning. Come back at two, please."

"Does—does she have to go out through this room?" Cornie asked as the model disappeared into a dressing room.

"Why, yes, sure, no other way of getting out. But say, old man, what's the matter? Let me give you a bracer."

He went over to a cellarette, took out a bottle and poured a stiff drink of whiskey. "You look as if you had just seen a ghost," he said as he held out the glass.

Cornie still sat staring at the doorway through which the girl had passed. "No! No! I thank you. I've sworn off. I am all right. Joe, that girl is my child!"

"What? Didn't know you had a daughter! She never said—why she didn't seem to know you," the other expressed his astonishment.

"I've—I've been a mighty poor father. I haven't seen much of her. She ran away from convent. I have been searching for her—almost a year."

"No, you don't say so! That's damn interesting. She has been posing in the Village for some time—in constant demand. Better watch her, Cornie! They call her the cold beauty. She let's them get just so intimate—go only so far—and then they get a smart slap in the face! She hasn't missed her step yet, but she'll bear watching."

"Thanks for the good word, Joe. You bet I will watch her now. Introduce her to me—but don't mention my name, I want to break it gently to her."

"Here comes the little lady now," said the sculptor, announcing her re-entrance.

"Meet the Village's rarest find," he continued, "Nearly Wild! That's her name, and that is what she has made us!"

"I think I found the Village," she smilingly jested.

"Nearly Wild," Cornie said, hesitantly; "abbreviation for Cornelia Wildner, 'Nelia for short."

The girl stared at him in astonishment. "How did you know?" she demanded.

"May I satisfy your curiosity over the luncheon table instead of here?" he asked in return.

"Yes. Your face looks familiar, but I can't place you," she assented.

He took her arm as he said, "Good-bye Joe. I'll see you later."

Cornie was fascinated by this delectable girl, whom he could not realize was actually his own child. Whether he would have felt such a fatherly and possessory feeling toward her if she had not also pleased his sense of beauty, is questionable.

Not overly tall, with a straightness that tended to increase her height, also added to by a thick, heavy head of black bobbed natural curls, Cornelia's body seemed exactly to fit her face or her face to fit her body, depending upon which was viewed first. Her face was very round—her cheeks oval and smooth as velvet. Her eyes, below very black brows, were a velvety black too. Their bigness might explain the fire, the sparkle, and the calmness they were able to express at will. Her nose was small and rounded—her lips a bit too tiny for a perfect Cupid's bow without the assistance of a lip-stick. She was a girl who would demand homage, she was the queenly type; a girl who would dare, she was unafraid; a girl who would suffer, she was loyal; a girl who would accomplish her end at any cost, she was determined.

At the moment when Cornie walked away from his friend's studio with this strange girl he felt a closer feeling, a deeper affection for her than he ever had felt toward anyone else. The wish to protect her, to keep her always by him, was uppermost in his mind; but he knew he must handle the situation with great delicacy, if he did not wish to lose what he had just found.

"You don't recognize me?" he began.

She shook her head. "You look like someone I know—but——"

"I am your father," he told her in a very matter-of-fact tone.

"You are my father!" she echoed. Then looking at him closely, "Yes—now I remember you. It is curious, that I have seen you so seldom that I did not recognize you."

"Not very good to look at," he admitted lightly, "but there is a lot beneath these features."

"A lot of what—money?" she asked gayly.

"Not only that, but an affection for you!"

"You never have shown that you cared!" she drew him up sharply.

"I know, but I never really knew you, nor realized how much you meant to me, until you were lost."

"Lost?" she demanded. "You mean until I escaped from prison!"

"Oh, come now, it wasn't as bad as all that! From what the girls tell me, you had some pretty good times."

"Underhanded, secretly; I detested it all! I must feel life! I was cramped, choked. I simply could not stand it, and I will not go back!" she asserted positively.

"You don't have to," he agreed. "Let's go in this old French place. It will be quiet, and we can talk."

It had become quite second nature for Cornie to paint in glowing fashion to his intended wives what marriage with him would mean, but never before had he used the brush with such sweeping hand. Dipping deep in the paint of his experiences and his travels, he laid a dazzling background for their future life. Together, he told her, they would roam the world at will, seeking adventure in every quarter. He would protect her and lead her.

With broad strokes he put on his hopes and longings for the future, which could only be fulfilled with her to share them. In clear, bright colors, he laid her future life before her—all that love and money could do for one with her beauty! No convents, no schools were on the canvas, but private tutors, music, art, all would be taken up with him. He would start over again, grow with her, achieve with her, and enjoy life with her!

She listened spell-bound to the wonderful picture he was creating for her. He had touched a responsive chord in his

own child, and a wave of pleasurable emotion surged over her.

Only when he finally stopped to see the effect he had made, did she mention her guardians.

"What will Aunt Clare and Uncle Jean say to all this?" Her question was as much to herself as to him.

With an unconscious air of proprietorship he declared, "*I am your father!*"

"But they were so good to me—and still—and still—I would run away from them as I did from Mother Justine! They call me 'Nearly Wild'! Sometimes I think I am all wild, for the quiet and peace of my life with uncle and aunt at 'Soul's Desire,' seemed to strangle me, ever since I can remember. I sometimes felt as if I would jump off the mountain ledge into the great Unknown, rather than stifle!" Her confession was uttered with an almost breathless intensity.

Cornie looked at her in astonishment. Here was his very soul, unbared to his view! Her wild disdain of a stifled life had found expression in his own strange Beauty Cult.

"I don't want to think about my soul!" she cried, stamping her little foot. "Uncle Jean always has his eyes uplifted. I want to live here—now! Take me, you understand me as no one else!" She threw herself at him, as the conviction grew upon her that he offered a real escape.

"We will forget everything but our own pleasure," he said selfishly. "I will make you the most envied girl in the whole wide world! But you must gradually take the good things I have in store for you. I don't want you to be a brainless beauty. You must combine your Uncle Jean's beauty of spirit with my love of physical beauty."

He was trying to tell her, that she must be not only a Love-Mate, a Heart-Mate, but a real Soul-Mate too. As Keats was the Soul-Mate of Clare and Jean, he wanted his daughter to be his Soul-Mate. He did not wish her for his Love Toy, but for his Soul Toy. It was his soul, that had

been called by his own child, slipping, slipping, into the prim-rose path that he knew so well. But his soul was having a difficult time penetrating his Beauty Cult, breaking through the layers, the rind of his life's wishes, that had concealed it for so long.

"We will go back to 'Soul's Desire,' and let your aunt and uncle know that I have found you," he decided.

So up to "Soul's Desire" they went, and after she had been affectionately greeted and scolded, Cornelia told them of her decision to go with her father.

They hesitated to approve, but when they called Mother Justine to tell her that the search had been successful, and explained the situation, she told them they must not come between father and daughter. Mr. and Mrs. Emerson, too, agreed with the Mother that it was best for both father and daughter to be together.

So Cornelia was installed in the old Wildner home, and her father took on the new role of protector and guardian. He hardly left her side, as he took up all her studies with her. The past drifted from his thoughts, and he planned for the future with new vision and bright hopes.

But he was wise enough not to make the girl devote all of her time to her studies. He took her about with him. He even let her spend some time at his studio, trying always not to deny her the freedom she had craved. He was astounded at the depth of her knowledge of life: the appalling wisdom about things she had better not known, which she had acquired and showed in the numerous little confidential chats they had together.

On one occasion she said: "Dad, I want to be your companion—not your little girl!"

"No," he surprised her by deriding her request. "I don't wish any girl whom I want to respect, to be my boon companion! Man ceases to be curious about his fellow carousers. It is woman's mystery that appeals to him."

"I don't see why doing the same things that make men his companions, should destroy her mystery."

"Let women once completely reveal to men that they have just the same crude, vulgar, sordid, animal sort of souls that most men have, and the men will stop marrying!"

"Well, is it only to solve this so-called mystery, that man marries?"

"Marriage is often a high price paid to gratify a man's curiosity which can't be satisfied in any other way.—His desire to investigate is not purely material, either—to view the unrouged cheek."

"Well, what then, is man curious about, Mr. Know-it-all?" she mocked him as she laughed.

"Man's curiosity is quite as much about a woman's or girl's soul as it is about her face and figure: it is quite as much about her mind as about her ankles."

"Surely in these days her lower limbs are no longer a mystery!" she rejoined.

"That's true enough, but once let her permit every man she meets to see all there is to view, know all there is to understand about her, the depths of her soul—the character of her mind—the degree of her passion—then he will cease to pursue her!"

"You mean that if girls bare their souls to men they will not attract the right kind, any more than the artists' model who poses in 'the altogether.' They may easily have affairs, but rarely marry. Still, you married the Follies girl," she said wisely.

"Most men want comforters for wives, not entertainers," he replied. "And when they do marry the latter type, the union is rarely permanent."

"So you want me to be a veiled beauty—a woman of mystery—and a comforter!"

"I want you to be like your mother. She was a real com-

forter, and yet retained that air of holding back something, so that I felt I never fully knew her real self."

"And then I will marry some man curious to discover my real being?"

"Some man, the man—who really loves you, will go through hell itself to satisfy his curiosity—his desire for you—just as you will for the man you really and truly care for."

## CHAPTER XXX

KEATS WILDNER at twenty was a diffident, studious boy. Close to six feet in height, his extreme thinness and angular frame accentuated his long face. His black eyes were set very deep in his head, and big black-rimmed spectacles framed them. His nose was somewhat long but straight. He was a lad who lacked confidence—who was not sure of himself—a spiritual-minded dreamer, but one whose dreams never left the realm of facts—the world was ever with him. He accepted it as he found it—without questioning, without fighting.

At Mother Justine's suggestion, he had been started on his theological studies at an early age and now looked forward to his ordination to the priesthood.

Clare arranged for Cornelia to spend the month of July at "Soul's Desire" when Keats would be home for his vacation.

Again he surrendered to the beautiful creature believing her to be his first cousin—he Jean's son, she Cornie's daughter. She took possession of him, as if it were her sovereign right to command his actions, as she ruled his thoughts. Love makes vassals of the strongest and it makes no distinction as to divinity students!

They strolled and climbed the mountain heights both actually and spiritually. Cornelia's developing beauty seemed to feed the hidden springs in Keats' soulful nature, and his softly expressed thoughts brought a spiritual intensity to Cornelia's features. The comradeship that developed was, for a time, free from any thought stronger than the joy of companionship, of mutual appreciation.

"It is strange how life catches us up, like the wind which

picks up a speck of dust and whirls it high and drops it low. So fate makes curious twists to our lives," Cornelia mused aloud as they reclined on the ledge where Keats so often could be found.

"I read from the sayings of an old Chinese philosopher just before leaving school," he met her mood of reverie, "'Go back to Nature, for, lying on her bosom, you will be guided on the proper way.' So, reposing here, we ought to receive the best instruction for our future course."

"Your way is clear," she replied solemnly. "You will complete your studies and become a priest. You will help others and lead a splendidly useful life. But I, what shall I do?" was her curious plaint.

Impulsively Keats drew her to him, and put his arms about her. "You must be my inspiration, my guiding star, my dream girl!"

"That is too ethereal," she complained. "I want a knight brave enough to carry me away and make me his bride. I am not satisfied to be your fairy guide!"

"I do want to be your chivalrous knight, but the shackles of fact hold us both fast."

"Every chain can be melted," she murmured.

"But the heat of the process destroys the links," he warned her. "The chains of the Church hold me, the chains of relationship keep us apart."

"I always thought the links of a chain were for the purpose of holding together."

"I wish they were," he breathed earnestly.

It was for them one of the rare moments in life, when two souls understand each other and, like a flash, the consciousness of a mutual love is realized! But here, instead of this realization being the spark to start the illumination of their future, it was shut off by a cloud of facts, that apparently would keep it forever from bursting into flame.

Cornelia felt the desire to master the situation in some

way; while Keats realized the futility of any effort to surmount such overwhelming obstacles.

"In the first place, if you want to be a religious teacher, why do you have to be a priest? Be a minister, and then you do not always have to be a bachelor," she pouted.

"A nice thing for a good Catholic girl to advise. I suppose I should be a turn-coat so I can get married!"

"Well, there must be some way out—you are not wed to the Church yet."

"No, I could never leave my faith. If I did anything different, I would not enter the priesthood, but take up literature as a profession, or teaching, or some other congenial work."

"Well, you don't have to be a priest, you know."

"But obstacle number two would still be there, we are first cousins." Neither Cornelia nor Keats himself had any thought that the latter was not Jean and Clare's own child.

"There are some states where we could get married," she asserted frankly. "I have asked about it."

"Did you really?" he replied. "But I would not like to be married in one state and unmarried in another—and our Church does not permit it."

"Silly, we wouldn't have to go to those nasty old states that are so old-fashioned."

"Well I think for the present, my dear coz, we better be satisfied with our platonic friendship."

"You may be satisfied, but I am not!" she spluttered roguishly.

And so the discussion would continue from time to time, always with the same ending: Keats postponing a decision on ways and means and Cornelia rebelling against the situation.

Keats was a second Jean, but with a worldly side that the latter did not possess. He seemed able to connect his soul desire with his love of beauty and heart hopes. Cornelia,

too, was like her father in his passionate love of beauty, but she had a spiritual insight that he lacked and seemed the embodiment of the soul of beauty. Together they complemented each other.

As they sat on the porch one day, Jean thought, "What a wonderful couple they would make! Together they are the real Soul Toys of the World! Deep spiritual realization—idealized beauty—bodily perfection—these are the things which make Man the Image of his Maker! I have helped to fashion their lives. They are the real culmination of my soul desire. And still, all those less favored human beings, whose lives I have touched in my settlement work, are they not also my soul children?"

"You are the loveliest rose of the summer," he heard Keats say to Cornelia.

"And you the soft rain that nourishes it," her poetic reply.

"But I don't want to be your rain-beau only," he laughingly bantered.

"Would you love me if I were as homely as an old hedge fence?" she asked anxiously.

"Beauty is'—"

"Oh it is—is it? 'Only skin-deep,' eh! Well, I suppose then, if my skin came off, you wouldn't look at me!"

"If you were skinless, I would still love you as much as ever!"

"Oh, then you would gaze at me as a freak of nature! I read, the other day, of a woman who had been very beautiful and was dreadfully disfigured in an automobile accident. She called her fiance to her and offered him his freedom."

"I hope he didn't accept it," Keats injected.

"He did just that! The destruction of her physical beauty had shattered completely the vision of his love."

"Thank the good Lord, we are not all built the same! He was a miserable cad to take up her offer like that!"

"Then you wouldn't do likewise, if I became an ugly old woman?" she queried anxiously.

"I love *you*—*you yourself!*" was his sincere answer. "And that does not mean only your lovely features or your soft pink skin. It is that intangible thing that we call soul—that is the *you*, I love! And your soul will remain, when your beauty fades. The painting on the bowl may wear off in time, but the sugar stays as sweet as ever."

"You make me sad with that thought. Everything we love must perish," she sighed.

"Except love itself—soul love—deep as the deepest ocean—that goes way beneath the surface."

"So when you were going to say 'beauty is only skin deep,' you meant you loved my soul, that's way down underneath the skin?"

"Just that. But I want you to stay beautiful too. I love you just as you are and as you will ever be."

"And I will love you whether you are fat or thin!"

"Even if I get all bald?"

"Even that," she laughed, imprinting a kiss on his hair, as if to ward off such a calamity.

These were different lovers than Clare and Jean had been. Theirs was an entirely spiritual love—this was a very personal affair. It would never be content with a friendly companionship, but cried for the more intimate relationship of husband and wife.

"Wouldn't it be awful if we ever stopped loving each other!" the girl exclaimed in a horrified tone.

"Our love must always be like the first June rose, bright and glorious in the flush of its fresh splendour."

"But the rose fades and dies," she said sadly.

"Our rose will never die," the boy asserted positively.

"Oh, I know! It will, as Wordsworth says, 'Lift its head for endless spring, for everlasting blossoming,'" she replied.

He nodded in affirmation of her apt quotation.

"But," she continued, "we must, like the rose, overcome the obstacles of heat and cold. Your life work and our cousinly relationship stand in the way of the full blooming of our rose."

"We must talk it over with the folks," Keats gave his decision.

Cornie had arrived for a few days' visit and the occasion to bring their troubles before their elders came very soon. They were all seated on the porch in the cool quiet of the early evening, when Cornelia, the more impetuous, blurted out of a clear sky:

"Keats and I love each other—what are you going to do about it?"

The assertion and bold query left the circle speechless for a time.

"When did you discover this astounding state of affairs?" Cornie finally asked lightly.

"We have always cared for each other," Keats quietly declared, "but we have just realized that this devotion has ripened into an overwhelming love."

"No! No, it cannot be!" Jean gasped as if words would not come. "It is impossible!"

"Why not, Dad?" Keats asked sharply.

"Your father does not mean you should not love each other," Clare quickly explained. "You are first cousins, you have been brought up as brother and sister, of course you should have an abiding love for each other. What he means is, that you should realize that this is the kind of your love, and not of sweethearts."

"He means we can never marry," Cornelia abruptly alleged.

"Yes, that's it," Jean admitted, grasping anxiously this simple statement of his intention.

"I suppose my intended profession is your first objection, and the fact that we are first cousins, your second," Keats amplified Cornelia's allegation.

"Aren't these reasons enough?" Jean aggravated the situation by the finality with which he asked the question.

"No! No!" Keats cried. "Love is more—above those things!" He spoke rapidly, not stopping to choose his words. "I will not be a hypocrite—wear a priest's garb and love another more than the Church! You wouldn't want me to be a hypocrite," he pleaded. "Cousins can get married in some places even if they cannot in New York."

"It is against the law," Jean parried.

"In some places—not everywhere," Cornelia supported Keats.

"You wouldn't want to be married in one place and law breakers in another?" Clare brought her ammunition to her husband's aid.

"I understand," Cornie slowly stated, "that a marriage valid in one state must be given full force and effect in every other, unless specifically forbidden."

Jean looked toward him in angry surprise. "You—you approve?"

"I want to see them happy. What is the good of forcing Keats to be a priest, if he doesn't want to be one? And first cousins have married many a time, you know that as well as I do," he brought out rather impatiently.

"You don't understand—" Jean began and then suddenly checked himself.

"I think—I do," Cornie haltingly replied. "You have set your heart on the boy's entering the Church, and you would sacrifice his happiness for your own satisfaction, or make a hypocrite of him."

"No—you don't know—you can't know!" Jean almost shrieked, as his features became distorted with the depth of his feeling.

"Is there some mystery about this?" Keats asked. His curiosity was now aroused by Jean's strange intensity of expression.

Clare was afraid that her husband, in his excitement, would tell of Keats' adoption, the knowledge of which they had been so careful to guard from the latter. She did not know of the letter pinned to his baby clothes, naming Cornie as his father, and could not understand the fear that possessed Jean.

"You must realize, my dear child," she smoothed over the situation, "that you have surprised your father. I think we had better not discuss the matter further now, but we will all think it over and take it up some other time."

"Don't try to stem the flood, Clare," Cornie warned. "They have a right to their happiness."

"Shut up, you damn fool!" Jean snapped at his brother, losing control of himself for the moment.

"My dear Jean, why this overbearing manner? Has Fate dealt you too hard a blow?"

"Yes, yes, too hard a blow," he mumbled. "Too hard a blow!"

Clare skillfully led the conversation into other channels, and shortly afterwards, Keats and Cornelia said they would take a walk in the moonlight.

As soon as they were out of hearing of the others, Cornelia gave voice to her troubled thoughts:

"How peculiar your father acted! I wonder if there can be any other reason why we should not be married."

"For heaven's sake, don't look for more reasons; aren't two enough? But Dad did talk very strangely, I don't understand it at all."

"Neither do I. Maybe he will tell my father, and I can get anything out of him," was her hopeful reply.

"There are some things that we should not seek to know," Keats observed moodily. "Maybe this is one of them."

She looked up at him sharply: "Do—you know what it is?" she questioned.

"No, I haven't the faintest idea, but I have an intuitive fear that it is something we cannot overcome."

"I thought you said, 'Love overcomes everything.'" She repeated quietly his oft-expressed words.

"I realize now that there is a force stronger even than love. Fate, Destiny, we call it, but it is really the domination of the Past, and the Future," he replied slowly.

"I cannot stand riddles; what do you mean by that queer statement?"

"The Past is what makes our human relationships, we cannot control that, and heredity is part of that Past. The Future, in our children compels us to hesitate in the Present. What will be the result to our children? We must ask ourselves that, and the answer must guide us."

"Then we are not free agents. Love calls slaves, is that it?"

"Alas, yes! We like to think we are the rulers of our own destinies, and up to a certain point we are, but there are times when we must admit that we are slaves to the past and future generations." He bowed his head as if in submission to the inevitable.

"Then we are only a connecting link, a bridge of sighs, starting in a torrent of our own tears at birth and ending in the wails of others at death."

"But while that bridge stands," he took up her thought, as they strolled down the path, "it is a credit to its Maker. It is sturdy and strong—it withstands the onslaught of the ever-charging winds and the rush of the waters about it and it serves its intended purpose."

"And is it intended?" she debated, "that we should stifle our love, commit love-suicide as it were, for the sake of our fathers or our children?"

"I don't know," he answered humbly. "Sometimes life is too much for us. We are dumb in the presence of its problems."

"Well, I am going to fight!" she decided brazenly. "If you want to help, all right. It is better to put up a single front. But whether you do or not, I am, so there!"

"It is not wisdom to contend against overwhelming odds."

"But it is bravery! I want to be like Helen of Troy, who started the Trojan conflict, like Eugenie, who called the Franco-Prussian war 'my little war.' I tell you I am going to fight, and fight hard."

"You old Amazon!" Keats dubbed her proudly. "I would be ashamed to call myself a man, if I didn't enlist under your banner. However, we must be sensible and find out first what we are fighting, before we begin."

"Most armies have not known whom they are fighting nor what they are fighting for."

"And the result has been mostly chaos, as far as the soldier was concerned," he persisted.

While Keats and Cornelia were discussing the matter, their elders were doing likewise. Clare, however, went in as soon as they had gone, leaving the discussion to the two brothers.

"Jean addressed Cornie ferociously: "How could you approve such a horrible thing?"

"Why not?" Cornie replied. "I can't see anything so terrible in it."

"Good God, man, don't you understand? Do I have to tell you?"

Cornie looked at him queerly. "Really, why not tell me what you mean? I am no clairvoyant."

"You must realize it now, if you did not know before. He has your very eyes!"

"My eyes? I don't understand! What do you mean? For heaven's sake, talk out and be done with this silly sophistry!" he urged tartly.

"They are sister and brother!" was all Jean could say.

"How can that be?" Cornie was dumbfounded. "You adopted Keats, and Cornelia is my daughter." Then suddenly his face clouded, he jumped up and took Jean by the shoulders: "You don't mean that he is Meta's child—Cornelia's mother's?"

"No! No!" Jean protested. "*He is your child—yours and Louise's!*"

"Mine? Louise? Who the hell is she? I've had several wives, God knows, but no Louise!"

"It was the night of your wedding to Clare," Jean explained. "I was well nigh mad, yes, mad with jealousy and disappointment! I followed a girl of the streets. In her room a baby cried, that child was Keats!" He stopped as if the narration brought the past too vividly before him. "I offered—I wanted to take her and the child out of such a life. She agreed to come with me; dressed the baby and gathered his clothes together. Then she went out on some errand. She never returned! Pinned to the baby's clothes was this letter." He extracted a time-worn sheet from his wallet and handed it to Cornie, who walked to the light and read:

"His father's name is Cornie Wildner. He wouldn't marry me, and I left him before our child was born. He never knew whether it lived or not. I don't think he'd care. I wouldn't take his money. Don't take it for my child. I was his plaything, that was all—but I loved him, and I don't complain. Take care of little Cornie—you will never see me again. It is the only way. I would pull him down, and you, too. Now no one ever need know his beginning. God bless him, and you too.

"Louise."

He held the letter in his hand for a few moments after he had finished reading and stared into space, as if trying to call back out of the past some recollection to add to the writing. Jean watched him intently, but said nothing. Cornie again took up the letter and read it carefully through a second time. Finally the tension between the two brothers snapped.

"Well?" Jean asked abruptly. "What have you to say now?"

"I am trying to think. I cannot remember any Louise. I never heard of her or of the claim she makes," he spoke deliberately and certainly. "I am very sure I would remember the circumstance—if it ever occurred. There have been many women in my life, of course, but no children, except Cornelia."

"Such a charge is hard to disprove," Jean ventured.

"Yes, that is true. What can I say further than that I know nothing of this woman or her claim?"

"You can see why even the thought of such a marriage set me wild. It is absolutely unthinkable!"

"Now, Jean, leave the hysterics out and try to consider the situation in a calm way. My daughter is really a wild, tender creature—like a fawn—and must be handled carefully or she is liable to run away, as she did from the convent."

"And your son?" heatedly Jean brought out his words.

"You are very sure. You always were cock-sure of disagreeable things!"

"Disagreeable! I would consider it the greatest privilege on earth to have been Keats' real father!" was the spirited retort.

"Oh, don't get sentimental! We have some plain facts to deal with, and the lives of two children very dear to both of us. Forget your heroics!" Cornie importuned.

"You can look at it dispassionately, you, who have been the creature of passion, who took on parenthood without a thought, and now would like to throw it off as easily. You cannot do it, Cornie! Nature has caught you this time; but the saddest part is that you have brought misery to two innocent beings; your children must suffer more than you."

"I question whether, assuming that I am Keats' father, I have done so great a wrong to be the partial cause of his existence. I doubt it. It is true, just now he would probably curse me for it, but consider the joy he has been to you; and if he gives Cornelia up——"

“*If? If? He must!*”

“On the slim evidence of this letter? But we must get to the bottom of it. *I am not his father.* The girl tried to hang it on me, because I happened to have money.”

“But she wouldn’t take your money.”

“I know that is what she said in the letter, but that is just what sounds fishy to me. It looks like a pretty deep plan, to me.”

“He has your eyes!” Jean insisted hotly.

“Other men happen to have black eyes also, and the mother might have had them too. He surely does not resemble me otherwise.”

“That is true, but his eyes are yours, nevertheless.”

Ignoring Jean’s repetition, Cornie continued: “If we do break this off, and he becomes a priest and helps to ease and comfort the world’s misery, is it better that he should have been born or not?”

“That is not for us to say. He was brought into the world without his volition.”

“Well, so are we all. The world would probably be a lot better off if many of the perfectly legitimate offspring of good substantial families, undamaged goods, were never brought into it. As you say, the whole problem of life is inexplicable.”

“You always had an easy way of avoiding responsibilities.”

“I am not trying to side-step anything, I am simply looking the facts squarely in the face. If I am Keats’ father, I don’t blame myself very much for bringing such a splendid example of manhood into the world!”

“And you left him for me to bring up!”

“I never knew he was in existence until you took him, and then had not the faintest idea of what you have claimed to-day. Your statement is too ridiculous to answer. You were under no obligation to adopt him.”

“He was my brother’s child.”

"Well, then, if it is true—I furnished you with a wife and child. You ought to be thankful," Cornie returned with an insolent smirk.

"I took over the obligations you shirked," angrily responded Jean.

"Yes? We do not seem to be making much headway in our plans."

"We must compel them to realize the utter impossibility of the situation!"

"How? You cannot tell Keats that you think he may be my illegitimate son, or that of someone else, either! He believes he is your lawful child—doesn't even know he was adopted. And what can you tell Cornelia?"

"We must think the matter over; but you see now that something must be done to separate them."

"Until this flimsy evidence can be sifted. If it is true, of course, they could never marry; but how to make them hold off until I can investigate, without giving them the true explanation, is surely a problem."

Nothing further was said regarding the matter that evening. The next morning Cornie said he had to go into town to attend to some business. Jean surmised that he was going to try to locate Keats' mother and positively determine his parentage, and said that he would accompany him.

Cornie suggested that Cornelia had better come in with him and that she and Keats should not see each other for the present. He really feared their elopement to some place where first cousins could be married.

"A wise suggestion," Jean backed him up. "It can do no harm for you to be apart for a few days, while your father and I attend to certain things that it is better you should not know about just now."

"I never heard of anything so ridiculous!" Keats objected strenuously.

"Your father and uncle know best," his mother told him.

"It looks like it—treating us like babies!" Keats sneered sullenly.

"You only make it harder for us all," Clare warned him. "Just be patient and everything may come out all right."

"And maybe it will not," he scoffed. "A great thing to take chances with."

"Now, Keats, be sensible," Jean urged.

"I cannot imagine what is the need of this secrecy. However, if you all think it is so necessary that we keep apart, until something is explained that *we* are now ignorant of, why, I cannot object. I will go back to St. Mary's convent this very night and I will not come out until you tell me that Keats and I can be married! I will shut myself up in that hot stuffy place forever, unless I know that we will not be separated." Cornelia indicated positively her intended action.

"That's right, my dear, you go to Aunt Mary. She will look after you." Clare was quick to approve her idea.

"I cannot stand it here without you," Keats complained to Cornelia.

"Your father will go in with Uncle Cornie for a few days, and I really need you, dear," Clare gave as her reason for wanting him to remain with her.

"All right, Mother, I will stay with you," he decided, as Cornelia nodded her approval.

In the morning, Cornelia, Jean, and Cornie left in the latter's car; the girl went to St. Mary's and the brothers to their old home, from which, as soon as possible, they started out intent on finding Louise.

They visited the boarding house where Jean saw her last. She had never returned there. He left the building hopeless, dead to all emotions except anguish and despair. It seemed as if a great river flowed between the present and that distant date, when he had gone out of the same house with the tiny child in his arms. A river whose waters had washed away every trace of the mother.

And Cornie too showed unusual traces of despair. His features, always smiling, were serious now, for pain, unlike pleasure, wears no mask. He led the way to all his former haunts, but no traces of a Louise could they find.

They were returning to their rooms late the next night, after a fruitless search, when Cornie remarked, "It will be as hard to bridle a lion or hold the horns of a fierce bull, as to control Keats when we return without news."

"We must trust in God to help us," said Jean, giving utterance to his only hope.

"Trust in God, but for His sake do not stop looking for the woman!" Cornie retorted. "I believe the only true form of heroism lies in seeing the world as it is and in facing conditions as they actually are."

"You mean, tell them the truth?"

"I would tell them what we *know* only, not what you surmise."

"Where would you draw the line?"

"Tell them that Keats is your adopted son. He will find out sooner or later anyway. And that you wanted to trace his parentage before they married."

"That will not hold water. Why should that make a difference?"

"Well, if that doesn't satisfy him, tell him there is a question of his legitimacy."

"That would be too cruel," Jean objected.

"It is more cruel to keep them in suspense indefinitely."

"Sometimes," Jean resumed, "a situation will take care of itself, like muddy water: no one can make it clear, but if it be allowed to remain still it will clarify itself. You want to add more mud to the pool."

"All right! All right! Don't tell them, let 'em eat out their hearts!" Cornie threw up his hands in a gesture of resignation.

"What will be the result of telling them? It isn't as if it would help any."

"Well, I suppose a little delay will not hurt matters. Let's try a few days longer."

So the search went on—a helter-skelter, meaningless looking, without beginning or end.

"Cornie rooted up his old cronies—the boys of the Heart-Mates Club—his studio associates—everyone from whom he thought that he might be able to find a clue. The name, Louise, was all they had to start with, and they could find no information that would help them to discover more.

After several days Cornie suggested that they go to St. Mary's and see how his daughter was standing the separation. Jean welcomed the idea, hoping that Mother Justine might give them some plan to work upon.

As they rode toward the Academy, Cornie gave vent to his thoughts: "Louise certainly did not lack originality, either in the plan she made for disposing of her child, or of herself."

Jean started to reply that, "Truth is original," but feared to antagonize his brother, so only said, "She certainly is a mystery, but Keats is very real!"



PART IX  
THE HEAVEN OF MOTHERHOOD



## CHAPTER XXXI

"SUFFERING seems to be the only medium by which man really becomes aware of God," said Keats, voicing to Clare his inmost thoughts.

"I think one is always aware of his Maker, but sorrow and pain deepen the human consciousness and draw man closer to the Diety," she supplemented.

"It doesn't seem fair that I should be left in the dark, when my whole life hangs in the balance. I feel so helpless—so utterly useless."

"I know, my son, I know. But what can we do? Surely you can have patience for a little while."

"But it is so much worse to have to surmise and imagine what is wrong. If only I could be taken into your confidence! You know, Mother, what it is, don't you?"

"Yes, I know," she admitted truthfully, for Jean had thought it best that she should, "but I realize that, hard as it may seem for you not to be informed, and much as it pains me not to tell you all, it is to save you, that matters must be left as they are for the present."

"I never heard of such a situation!" he cried impatiently.

"I do not think there ever was quite the exact counterpart," she conceded.

"But why the mystery? I am no child! I am afraid to let myself think—I fear such horrible things."

"My dear boy, the knowledge that you are not entirely the master of your own destiny, has overpowered you."

"I wish I had never been born!" he cried as he bent his head and sobbed out his misery.

Clare held her arms wide open, "Come, my child, mother understands."

The mother always knows. She doesn't laugh at the child's vexation nor is she overcome by the man's wrongdoing. She understands, but she suffers. She sees her own soul reflected in that of her child. Her heart may be breaking—but still she smiles. Her hopes may be tumbling about her—but her face shows it not. Her life's blood may be slipping from her and still she smiles—that her own may never know the pain that is hers! The mother's soul is the deepest in the world; it is more akin to God than any other!

"Be brave, my lad," she whispered. "It will all come out right."

"What gets me," he complained, "is the futility of effort. Now what can I do to clear up this mess? Sit here and mope. And 'Nelia, too—she can not do anything. Just sit and wait—and wait."

"That is what we have to do many times in life, my child; just mark time, while events stronger than we, round out our lives."

"Then you believe in Destiny, Mother?"

"Call it God's will rather, but whatever name you give it, there is a Power beyond man's control that turns his life into unexpected channels, thwarts some dearest ambitions, and fulfills others. It is a something greater than Man."

"Certainly you do not believe that a good and just God, or the great God-power—Love—plans out each one's life, measures the amount of joy and sorrow?"

"No, what I mean is, that try as hard as we can to shape events according to our own ideas of what will make us or others happy, circumstances in the shape of Death—Birth—Sickness—War—Human Stubbornness—will prevent the fulfillment of the best made plans."

"Perhaps—perhaps," breathed the boy, "it is all for our own good."

"It may be. That is the old question of why the good suffer and the wicked prosper," Clare suggested.

"Perhaps the very suffering of the good is for their own trial and growth, and a blessing in disguise; and the prosperity of the wicked may prove their ultimate undoing," he philosophized.

"We never know another's soul. If we could reach the inmost being, our whole viewpoint might be changed."

"Our little confidence, Mother darling, has somehow made me more acceptable. I feel so small now, so insignificant, as if I were little again and in your arms crying for something—what—I do not know."

"Crying for happiness, my dear. Every baby protests against anything that interferes with his inalienable right to happiness and comfort. I pray both may come to you."

So all mothers pray for their children in the same language of mother-love. All children do not understand this language, but Keats did, and said to her: "I know you would tell me if you could. I will try for your sake to control myself, but I don't think there would be any harm in my going to see 'Nelia at the convent, do you?"

"No, that would be perfectly all right. When will you go?"

"This afternoon. Please go with me."

"Very well. If you really wish it, I will."

"I do want you; please come."

"Surely, I will. But I want to ask you, Keats, to think over carefully what it means to give up your profession. You know how much we all hoped to see you ordained."

"I will, Mother dear, but if the current gets too strong it is useless to resist, I am afraid my love for Cornelia will carry me away."

"You must make the decision. You have your own life to live, but sometimes what seems a torrent stream in the springtime of life, turns out to be only a dried-up brook in the summer's height. That is why I advise careful thought. Your happiness means more to me than anything else, you realize that, Keats, dear?"

"Indeed I do, Mother."

It so happened that Clare and Keats arrived at St. Mary's only a short time after Cornie and Jean had been ushered into the Mother's presence.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," Mother Justine welcomed them all. "But I am sorry that Cornelia is out for a walk with a class of girls and two sisters. She will come back soon."

They were hardly seated when there came a knock at the door. Upon the Mother's calling to enter, a nun of medium height, very thin, and with a Madonna-like face of unearthly pallor, but still attractive, came into the room and handed Mother Justine some papers. "This is Sister Grace," the latter introduced her, "she has just returned from Belgium, where she has been stationed for some years. This is my niece, Mrs. Wildner—my nephews, Jean and Cornelius Wildner—and my grand-nephew, Keats."

At the mention of the name, "Cornelius Wildner," the nun swayed, tottered, and would have fallen had she not been standing near a table. She looked at Keats: "This is *your* son?" she asked Cornie.

"No," Jean answered quickly, and wondering why she should have come to that conclusion. "He is *my* son." As he spoke he looked her full in the face and then gasped as he sank back into the chair from which he had risen upon her entrance.

"Are you ill, Jean?" Clare cried as she went to him. Cornie hurriedly ran for water. Drinking it, Jean gained control of himself.

Sister Grace stood by, while Mother Justine looked at her in amazement, unable to fathom the cause of the strange scene and wondering why she remained in the room.

As soon as Jean could speak he said, "Keats, please leave the room for a few minutes; there is something I want to say to the others."

The young man looked curiously toward the nun, who continued to stare at him questioningly. "Very well, Father, but I should think the time has come when I might be taken into your confidence!"

"Not yet, Keats, not yet," was all he could mutter.

After he had gone, Jean turned abruptly to Sister Grace, who had sought a chair:

"Was your name Louise, before you took your vows?"

It was now the turn of the others to start in surprise.

"Good God!" Cornie ejaculated, "is it possible?"

The nun hesitated, looking perplexedly at the members of the group. She paused for breath to voice her reply. She could not read their minds, so asked the non-committal "Why?"

Jean gained courage to proceed and he bared their problem to her. He told her, how the happiness of two people hung by a thread; how he had taken the little boy from the rooming house and brought him up as his own; how they had searched for Keats' mother in order to determine his parentage, and how fruitless the seeking had been.

Attentively she listened, and when he had finished, quietly admitted with quivering lips: "*My name—was Louise. I am Keats' mother!*"

Her superior was the first to regain her composure. "*You are his mother?*" she questioned simply, but sharply.

"Yes, I was the girl who left the child in your care," she acknowledged as she turned toward Jean.

"I knew I was not mistaken," he asserted.

The sister did not hear, but started softly and slowly, almost in a whisper, to tell her story.

"I came of a good family," she stated proudly, "my father was a prosperous merchant in Poughkeepsie. I was an only child. My mother died when I was about to graduate from Vassar. My father grieved so for her, that he let his business decline. I kept company with a boy whom I had played

with since childhood. His father was the president of one of the big banks and his mother and sisters leaders in the town's society."

She stopped as if trying to dig down into the well of memory was an effort, but as no one spoke, she resumed: "We loved each other, but my father's business troubles went from bad to worse, and finally he became sick. His store was closed, and he told me one day that there would be about enough left to bury him. That was the truth! He died soon after—and I found myself alone in the world. My sweetheart asked me to marry him, but his family had ignored me in my trouble, and I refused. I had determined to sell our household goods and go to New York. I thought with my college education, that I could support myself and get along all right."

She breathed a deep sigh as if the recollection was too much for her. Jean stared at her—every word was hypnotic!

"Just before I left, he insisted upon my marrying him. We were married by a Justice of the Peace in Poughkeepsie!"

Cornie asked if she wanted a glass of water as she seemed unable to proceed. She nodded, and he left the room to get it. No one moved until his return.

The nun sipped the water, and then continued: "He insisted on taking me to New York. He stayed with me for three weeks—then his father sent word that if he did not come home at once he need never come. I think he knew of our marriage, although he never admitted it. I secured a position as a social secretary and worked for a number of months—until—"

Again she hesitated, and the color slowly mounted to her pale cheeks.

Mother Justine could control herself no longer; she uttered a glad cry—"Then Keats is a legitimate child!"

"*He is,*" the sister replied.

"But why did you say that Cornie was his father?" Jean

quizzed her, not entirely satisfied with her explanation.

"I will come to that in a moment," she answered. "While I worked, I lived very quietly. I had a few girl friends, that was all—no men at all. I had written regularly to my husband, but sent the letters to General Delivery, as his father had warned him that if he ever found that he had anything to do with me he would disinherit him. I came to hate his father and his whole family bitterly!"

The words did not seem to be those of the calm nun—it appeared as if she were giving a recitation.

"Finally, before my child was born, the letters that I had written came back unopened. I did not know why. Later I learned that my husband had been ill with influenza and died! No one knew we were married, except possibly his father. I did not know when he died. I heard of it from an old friend, whom I happened to meet on the street.

"I had saved a little money, and came through the ordeal of my son's birth without serious difficulty. I became very lonely. I determined I would never let my husband's family know. The only thing they ever had against me was that I was poor and had no social standing," she defended herself.

"The ways of the world are strange," Mother Justine meditated, as she fingered her rosary.

"I had a great fear that if my husband's family every heard of my child, they would take him from me. I grew so to hate them that I determined I would do anything rather than let them have my child."

The Mother gazed steadily at her as if unable to understand the ferocity of her hatred.

"This thought so preyed upon my mind that I was unable to work long at anything. I lost one position after another and became thoroughly discouraged. At last I met some girls who were having the good times which I had always denied myself. I had always been a good girl until my child was a year old, then I sought the bright lights. I went from

bad to worse. It was at a party at Rector's that I met Cornelius Wildner."

He stared at her at the mention of his name. His thoughts ranged through his memory seeking recollection of her, but he shook his head at the vain effort.

"I had heard of him before," she plunged on, "I knew he was wealthy, and the thought occurred to me, as we sat at the table, that if I could in some way get him to adopt my little one his future would be assured. *I never knew him or met him except that once at the table in Rector's.*"

An audible sigh of relief went up from the little group. Mother Justine raised her eyes upward and breathed a prayer of thankfulness. "Strange are the ways of the Lord," she declared again, with an unusual fervor in her voice.

"I became reckless——" the nun dropped her eyes, "a common woman of the streets!" A shudder at the recollection went through her. "I determined that if I could get my little one taken by some responsible person, I would do away with myself."

Mother Justine piously crossed herself at this confession.

"I did not know you were his brother," she addressed Jean, "but I felt that you were the kind of man who would make him support my child, if you believed that he was the father. That was why I wrote the note I left. I had thought it all out. If I made it appear as if money were the one thing I did not want for myself or child, it would be the most convincing argument in favor of the truth of my claim. You see, I was a college girl, not unresourceful."

Cornie nodded his head as if approving her action and admiring it.

"I left the house that night, with the firm intention of ending it all—for myself."

Clare shuddered as she thought how impossible of solution their problem would have been, if she had carried out her plan.

"I wandered about the streets until morning, when I happened to pass a Catholic Church, which many people were entering for an early mass. I went in, almost unconsciously, and there, at the foot of the altar of the Virgin, a new peace settled on me. I felt assured that my child would be taken care of and my husband's folks would never know of him. I vowed that I would devote the rest of my life to the Holy Virgin's work. I went to the priest and confessed, and asked him to direct me to a convent. I entered the order of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph, and was sent to Belgium, where I worked all through the war. I think I redeemed my past life," she said timidly. "God knows I have tried hard! Perhaps I was sent back here for this very purpose." She ceased, as if her tale were done, but feeling beneath her robe brought out a paper, yellow with age, and handed it to Mother Justine. The latter read aloud the heading — "*MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE—Louise Standish to Arthur Thornton.*"

"Thank God!" Cornie declared fervently.

"Let us all pray for a moment," the Mother suggested, and they bowed their heads in silent devotion.

"It is wonderful—astounding," Clare marveled, "that it should have turned out this way!"

"A miracle!" Jean styled it.

"How can we let Keats and Cornelia know that everything is settled?" Clare asked. "They are not even first cousins!"

"We must tell them the truth—it is not necessary to go into details—I will tell them, myself. Call them! Cornelia must be back by now," were the Mother's decisions issued with rapid fire.

"My children, come here," she beckoned them to her as they entered the room.

"The Lord has strange ways of making us happy, means beyond our mortal understanding. But if we have faith, it always comes out right."

Cornelia smiled at her. "I knew it would," she said simply and confidently.

"Be prepared for a surprise, Keats," she enjoined. "You are not the son of Clare and Jean, you were adopted by them when only a little tot!"

He passed his hand over his brow as if he could not comprehend. "Not their son! *Then who am I?*" he questioned with a startled cry.

"You are *my son!*" Sister Grace declared, as she came forward with wide-open arms.

He stood for a moment as if petrified. "Your son?" he demanded. "How can that be!"

She drew him to her. "I was married before I took my vows. Your father died, you were adopted, and I became a nun."

"Here is the marriage certificate," Mother Justine supplemented. "You see it is all very regular."

"But why the mystery?" Keats inquired with a dumb, stunned look. "I do not understand!"

"We only found your mother this very afternoon, or rather she discovered us here," Cornie explained. "We could not let you be married without knowing who you really were."

"I understand," Keats replied. "The first cousin objection was only a subterfuge?"

"Yes," Cornie lied glibly.

"I see now, that silence, or even lies, are better than real knowledge at times. I don't think I could have stood the truth. It must be dreadful not to know who one is!"

"There is no legal objection to your marriage now," Clare injected.

Sister Grace looked inquiringly at Keats, who had quite recovered himself.

"This is Cornelia," he explained. "We are in love with each other. This terrible mystery has almost broken our

hearts. I am studying for the priesthood, but I am afraid I will have to give it up—for her."

His mother looked at him sadly. "Be sure you know your mind—yes, your soul—before you make the final decision. The Church is really your father and mother! Do not desert them in haste!" Suddenly she looked heavenward: "Christ, help me to hold him!" she breathed softly.

He saw the pain that his announcement had given her, and his expression changed.

While the sister was speaking, Cornelia's face had turned a deep red.Flushed and excited she turned to her. "I will not give him up. Do you understand? I will not give him up!"

Mother Justine exclaimed in surprise, "Why Cornelia, how can you be so unladylike?"

"I love him!" her emotion blazed forth. "We are Soul-Mates, yes, and Heart-Mates, too. We are one in thought and one in soul. You cannot separate us!"

"No one wishes to do so," the Mother Superior quickly assented. "Keats is the only one to decide. But I want him to hear something." She took a book from the table and read slowly, "Who is the hero? He who conquers his passions. He that ruleth his spirit, is better than he that taketh a city."

"I suppose I have nothing to say! I am only a woman to be buffeted back and forth like a feather on the ocean—moved by every wind and wave of his emotion!" Cornelia interposed.

The shock of the recent revelation seemed to have benumbed Keats. A vast relief that there was now no legal objection to his lawful marriage to Cornelia, was his first overpowering sensation. This was followed by an awsome feeling, as he realized that this sweet-faced nun was his real mother. The thought came to him uncalled, that he owed an obligation to this mother whom he could not distinguish

in his present muddled thinking, from the Church which she served; a duty to continue his studies for the priesthood and sacrifice his love for Cornelia. His innermost being was touched by the proud, pathetic, longing eyes of his own mother. His religious training was surging to the front.

As Cornelia listened to the Mother Superior reading from the old book, she watched Keats' face and sensed the inward struggle. An intuitive fear that a supposed call of duty might over-master his love for her, caused her to cry out: "Don't, please don't listen to them! Come away with me!"

"God in His unfailing providence has marked for the grace of vocation, those who are to serve him as his chosen instruments. We must recognize these vessels of election and set them apart, that they may be duly fashioned and tempered for the use of the calling. We should not interfere in their preparation or seek to put them to other purposes," Sister Grace broke in with deep feeling.

To the half-deadened Keats, the nun's words sounded like the voice of God, the preserver, and Cornelia's as that of Satan, the tempter.

He crossed to where Cornelia stood, and folded her unresisting in his arms. "My darling," he whispered, "I love you more than my life, but we must do what is right."

She pushed him from her, her eyes blazing, and cried wildly: "*You* are giving in—you do not love me—you have only known her a little while," she looked resentfully toward his mother—"and you want to do what she asks!"

"She gave me life, and suffered for me." He almost unconsciously defended her.

"But I do not want to spoil your happiness," said Sister Grace softly, sadly. "I only want you to be sure of yourself."

"I want to be, Sister." He could not call her mother. "I know now, I must be certain; the light in your eyes has shown me my duty to consider."

"You would murder my soul!" Cornelia cried. "And my soul-children, too!"

"My dear, dear girl, be quiet," Mother Justine reproved her. "You do not realize what you are saying."

"You are all against me! *I demand the right to choose the father of my children!*"

"Whatever do you mean by that?" Mother Justine asked in frank amazement.

"I have always loved children passionately. As a little child I would cuddle my dollies, making believe they were babies. Sensing my feelings, my nurse, whenever chance put a real infant in my path, would place the wee bundle in my arms. O, what rapture I felt! I would hug it tightly, and cry when I was deprived of its warmth and softness!"

The little group listened intently, wondering at the disclosure, but unable to connect it with her bold remark.

"My earliest recollections are all of playing with a little lad and looking up to him for protection, for leadership. As I lisped my first words, his name was most often on my lips. I admired him then. As my reason grew with my body, I learned to respect him, and then—of a sudden—it all flamed forth as an everlasting love! He had been the father of my dollies in all my play, now I fancied him as the actual father of my very real dream-children! When we were both old enough to understand the meaning of love, he told me that he reciprocated my affection. I had always known it, but the affirmation gave me exquisite joy. Then came the fear that our cousinly relationship and his studies would separate us. Both were overcome, and now—"

Sister Grace was deeply affected by her recital. "And now," she echoed, "You face the possible sacrifice of your dream-child for its father's sake."

She ignored the nun's comment, but asked point-blank: "If the one supreme desire of your life was to have a child of your very own, to have as the father of that child the com-

panion of your youth, because he was physically, mentally and morally your equal, would you not be justified in demanding that he be not taken from you—that your longing be first satisfied?"

"A most brazen statement, utterly unbecoming to one of your training!" the Mother Superior commented tartly, as she scowled her disapproval, but hardly could find words to express her indignation further.

"But with lots of meat in it!" Cornie came to his daughter's support.

"It is the man's responsibility," Jean retorted. "If Keats decides that he does not want to marry you, but prefers to become a priest, it will not be for you to object."

"No, I am to be compliant and say, 'My good lord and master, throw away my happiness, murder my children!'—No!—We are one now, I tell you, our souls are married—always have been. I will fight! You hear? I will fight for my right to happiness, and for my children!"

"You are only a child yourself," Mother Justine gently chided her. She did not yet appreciate the full significance of her plea. "There are many more young men for you to select from. Do not stand in the way of Keats' career."

"I demand the right to choose the father of my children! I have selected Keats. If you insist on his becoming a priest, very well, I shall bow to your wills on that point; we cannot be married—but I will still insist upon my right—and our child will be born outside of lawful wedlock!"

She had stripped her dream of every vestige of prudery! They viewed the naked reality of a demanding, craving child-hunger!

"I really think it is high time that we all leave," Clare said abruptly as she stood up, her cheeks scarlet.

"No!" Mother Justine waved her back. "Such a statement cannot be left unanswered. This matter must be settled here and now, once and for all time!" Clare sank down

into her chair, for the stern expression would brook no refusal.

"It is a very delicate matter to discuss, but the marriage relation is far too sacred an institution to be lightly set aside. It is the holiest, the most beautiful of all. It is the rosebud of romance in full bloom! Cornelia, you must put such wicked ideas out of your mind. It would be wrong under any circumstances and to suggest such a thing with a student for the priesthood—unthinkable!" The Mother's breast heaved in her indignation. Suddenly, the teacher spoke out: "I forbid you to think of such a thing!"

"Forbid! Huh!" Cornie sneered. "As well order the infant life, ready to be born, to stay in darkness and not find light in the world, as to command the thought, already born in the soul, to remain there and not find light in the mind! You can accomplish the first, only by killing the life of the child, the second, by murdering the soul of the thinker!"

"Surely you do not approve your daughter's wild ideas?" the Mother remonstrated.

"I am neutral," he responded. "But I respect her right to her own happiness, to express her individual views, to think for herself!"

"No happiness can be found in breaking moral laws, not to say legal ones," was her positive retort.

"I question even that!" he persisted. "Love, the effort to express the true beauty of the soul, knows no law!"

"You advocate free love then—no marriage bonds at all, I suppose," she said bitterly. "A pretty world it would be!"

"Because one refuses to be a slave to conventions, does not mean that they should all be destroyed."

"Oh, for others you would keep them, but for yourself and your daughter, forget them. Is that it?" she asked with biting sarcasm.

During their strained argument, Clare felt as though she were a part of Cornelia's soul. She thrilled with the fervor

of her soul longing, but not until the Mother joined Cornie with his daughter as outcasts did she emerge from her silence.

"I was once afraid to break the rules of Society's game," she said revealing her own experience: "I bowed to the dictates of what others did and thought and said. I lived to regret. Only when I was strong enough to brave the scandal-monger, to venture beyond the accepted pale did I find happiness—but as soon as possible, I sought the friendly protection of the golden bond."

"And what are you advising?" the Mother asked coldly.

"She is approving a liaison between your priest-to-be and my daughter, that they may bring a child into the world to satisfy her longing, because you religious fanatics are trying to keep them from entering the lawful bonds of matrimony, in order that you may gain a priest for your Church! You are making it the slaughter-house of love!" Cornie peppered the argument.

"I take it, you want to reduce the sex relation to the level of animal instinct," Jean retorted.

"Again the war is on!" Clare spoke as if from the past. "The cohorts of Materialism—Cornie, Cornelia, and now myself—against the ranks of Spiritualism—Mother Justine, Sister Grace and Jean! On one banner is written '*Satisfy your love on this earth!*' on the other: '*Chastise the body, save the soul!*'"

"I am surprised!" Jean observed. "I thought you had really become a Soul-Mate. I believe Keats' highest duty, his first duty, is to his ideal—the service of his God and his fellowmen!"

"I always said I was as much a Heart-Mate as a Soul-Mate, you know that!"

Keats had been sitting with his head resting on his hands, his elbows on his knees. Now he suddenly looked up. "I have been silent," his words came slowly, softly, almost painfully, "because my soul will not give up either

of its toys—the Church or Cornelia, my love. I have been trying so hard to think, to decide.” He shook his head sadly. “I don’t know what to say—really—I don’t know what to say.” He looked toward Cornelia and then at his mother, helplessly, childishly, as if expecting them to decide for him.

“You are upset, not yourself.” Mother Justine as usual took charge of the situation. “He has had several shocks,” she explained to the others. “He must have time to consider; surely there is no need for an immediate decision. Return to your studies. Cornelia will have her father to keep her busy, and then when your next summer’s vacation comes, you will both be steadier, older, and more prepared to plan your future.”

Cornelia could only stare at Keats while he drank in the Mother’s words, which seemed to him as divine guidance in his dilemma.

“Yes, Aunt Mary, yes, you are right,” he agreed brokenly.

Cornelia, with a shrug, gave up her present battle, but with a sudden squaring of her shoulders, gave her final word: “I consent, but understand, I will not relinquish my soul desire! Do I make my meaning clear? Keats will always be the one man in my life!”

“And you will always be the one woman in mine!” he avowed earnestly.

He crossed to her and held her hands for a moment; then they fell into each other’s arms. Finally they separated, as if each second together was too painful to prolong.

Cornelia went to Sister Grace and kissed her; then to Mother Justine and rested her head wearily on her shoulder. When she kissed her Uncle Jean the tears would not be held back, and she finally gave way as she hugged Clare.

The farewells were hastily said. Keats had a strange feeling as he bade his real mother, good-bye. She looked at him with such proud eyes that, for the second, his only thought was, “I must never, never, fail her.”

At last they were all gone and the two nuns embraced. "My dear, you have cleared away the mists, you were God's messenger!" the Superior exclaimed.

"But after the mists, came the real fog. I fear Nature will be too strong for them."

"Keats will never break his vows."

"But he has not taken them as yet, he is only a student."

"God will watch over them."

"I hope so, we must pray for them. Life is so hard at times. The appreciation of the Beautiful would soften it, I think."

"There is Beauty in everything, but our eyes are closed, we do not see it. Cornelia's passionate cry for Motherhood is one of Life's beauties. Keats' faithfulness to Duty is another."

"She sees only the Beautiful, she has dared to free herself from all thoughts of ugliness. Her seeming boldness is really the innocence of the child, who knows no wrong in what it says," Sister Grace pointed out.

"But the child cannot distinguish between Good and Evil."

"It does not know the Evil. All is Good and Beautiful. If we were all like that there would be no distinction. '*Honi soit qui mal y pense!*'"

It was only after Sister Grace had retired that the wonder of the finding of her son came upon her. "Keep him clean," she prayed. "Give him back to me."

She thought of Keats' father, and then of her present husband, the Church. "His father is gone, he belongs to us now. Send him to us," she prayed with a new fervor.

Cornelia too, in the quiet of her own room on her bended knees, was praying: "Show me the way to realize my fondest hopes. Take him, take everything away from me, only, please God, first let him be the father of my wonder child—my soul-child!"

A Madonna-like peace and holiness spread over her face,

as she whispered her strange prayer: "*Oh, Mary, Mother of Sorrow, help me! Help me to bear my dream-child! Mine and Keats'!*"

## CHAPTER XXXII

BACK at school, Keats soon regained his composure. As in the early isolation of his life at "Soul's Desire," his naturally studious and retiring disposition reveled in the seclusion which the divinity school permitted. He gave himself up entirely to his studies and took no part in the school activities or the college pranks and enjoyments of his fellow students. He was not even regular in his correspondence with Cornelia. His affection for her was something he took for granted; it was a part of himself, and always would be; but it troubled him no more than the care of his hair, which occasionally required special treatment to be made to lay flat, but ordinarily responded to brush and comb.

Cornelia, however, found the situation much harder. Her love, and she could never decide whether it was her love for Keats alone or as the prospective father of her children, would not be quiet and in control, but flared up constantly with an insistence which required her to write and write to Keats—many letters to his one. What was it that held this impetuous, beautiful, willful creature to the considering, reserved, almost shy boy? She was the cave-woman type, determined to pound and force her way to the consummation of her wishes. She did not stop to analyze her emotions, but strangely did not often think of marriage. It seemed superfluous. "If one really loved, what difference would the few words of the priest make?" she would think.

Clare and Jean spent the winter with Cornie and Cornelia at the old Wildner home. Cornelia continued her studies and was constantly, as she put it, "dragging her father, aunt and uncle all over town." She did not care for others of her own age, they bored her.

To Clare, she confessed one day that, "No one understands me." She took her aunt by the hand and led the way to her room. There she opened a closet door where, carefully arranged in ten little beds, were a like number of dolls representing children of every race.

"You will laugh at me!" she cried, as suddenly, overcome by her emotions, she threw herself on the bed, laughing and crying hysterically.

"No, I understand," Clare soothed softly. "I, who have no children and never can have any, I understand your longing. And my child, there is something else that you do not know that may explain your feelings."

"Oh, tell me, Aunt Clare! Sometimes I think I must be crazy! That is why I cannot join in the silly talk with other girls. These," she pointed to the dolls, "mean so much to me. To them, the very thought of children calls forth silly giggles."

"My dear, your mother longed for your birth so that she might hold the love of her husband. Your coming meant more to her than that of the ordinary child, no matter how great the joy of its arrival. You were her hope of happiness, you were her life!"

"Do you think that may account for the way I feel?"

"Perhaps! And you have also a part of your father's intensity of desire."

"I had to tell you, to show someone, or I would have gone out of my mind."

"Thank God, my dear, that undoubtedly you will be able to satisfy your desires."

"But, Keats—"

"You must not be too certain of him. He may decide to continue his studies. I would not count too much on him."

"He is everything to me!"

"I know, I know. He will be home soon for his vacation and then you and your father will come to 'Soul's Desire,'

too. He has promised me the month of July, so you have something to anticipate."

"Something to anticipate!" Cornelia echoed.

Early in the Spring Clare and Jean returned to "Soul's Desire," and the last day of June found Keats back with them. A few days later Cornelia and Cornie arrived.

Cornelia found Keats more sobered, more reserved. She caught her breath in fear after the first day, for she could see that while he gave every evidence of his affection for her, he was not the active lover she had hoped to find, but one who looked open to reason, pro and con. Life had become a more serious thing to him than ever, and love a thing apart. To her—love was life!

She determined as she lay sleepless that first night of their reunion, that she must act and act quickly, if she were to win. She dozed off, and when she awoke the first tints of the dawn were in the eastern sky. They touched the hazy mountain peaks like calcium stage lights. She slipped a flimsy, veil-like wrap over her night gown and sat at the window gazing into the misty cloud-filled morning. She felt a part of this ghost-like new day. She looked at her watch. It was four-thirty!

A slight cough came from the window of the next room, just a few feet away. She knew Keats was in this room. Suddenly she felt an overpowering impulse just to look at him as he slept, as she used to do when as children they were here together. She always was the first to awaken and would tip-toe into his room and pull his curly locks. She laughed as she thought how surprised he would be to see her standing again beside his bed. With the new day aborning—a suddenly conceived plan—a mad desire to pull his curls once more came over her!

Quickly she stepped over the sill on to the dew-saturated boards of the porch and traversed the few steps to the next window. She looked in. There he was, his curly hair on the

pillow just as years before! She stepped over the sill into his room. Half-way between the window and the bed she paused, for he had opened his eyes. He stared as if looking at a dream-creature! A frightened second in which she contemplated rushing out—then a sudden bold determination to remain!

Every man has concealed in a corner of his heart a furtive unexpressed wish that some fine morning he will wake up and be pleasantly surprised to find his beautiful dream-girl actually sharing his room. But Keats knew that in real life such happenings are exceedingly rare, so he did not believe what his eyes told him.

Then the unexpected occurred, the dream-girl opened her lips and called: "Keats!"

His veneration for her, for all womankind, made him slow to believe the invitation her eyes extended, but his ears affirmed his sight. His dream had come true! Almost unconsciously, he arose and embraced her, just as he had always done in his dreams. It was the feel of her in his arms, the caress of her lips on his, that really awakened his body—and yet stupefied his soul—like a drug which puts the body to sleep and awakens the dream mind.

"I had to come," she explained, as she met his embrace with a fervor that set both aquivering.

Nature was her strong ally. She had found the way to overcome his reason, his reserve, his life! She had shown him she could give without thought of her own life, or rather with consideration only of another life, and he had taken without thought of his Church, of his future, even of her!

As she hurried back to her room the now thoroughly awakened earthly lover whispered after her, "Tonight, I will come to you."

After she had gone he tried to analyze his feelings. He experienced certain qualms. "I should have refused to

accept her offering, sent her back to her room as she had come," he thought in self-abasement. He suffered a shock of disillusionment. She was no longer on a pedestal, and he lost a certain amount of his self-respect. He even felt a sort of repulsion, as toward a fallen angel—tainted good—divine carrion!

"And yet," he reasoned further, "it was a natural, an instinctive appetite that we did not hesitate to satisfy; an appetite as unmoral in itself as any other—the desire for food, for sleep, which becomes moral or immoral only in the manner and motive of gratification. The consuming of stolen food, sleeping at a post of duty, are unquestionably wrong, but who can say that Cornelia's longing for motherhood is not such a sacred instinct as makes her action moral?"

During the day he tried to get away by himself so that he could more thoroughly diagnose the situation, but Cornelia saw to it that he did not. She kept him enthralled in the lure of the moment, and when the next day he did stroll off alone, he admitted to himself: "If I had had the opportunity of considering the matter, I never would have permitted Cornelia to sway me, a student for the priesthood, to her will, but now—" The physical proximity had fanned his dormant love into an active passion, with as gnawing a hunger, as insistent a demand for its satisfaction, as her ever living desire.

As the days wore on, a doubt began to assail him as to Cornelia's love. He felt he had to quiet the uncertainty which persisted in rising. Carefully he put it into words: "Do you really love me for myself, or only as the means for you to achieve motherhood?"

"I love you for yourself, and for that love I would surrender myself, body and soul, without restrictions or saving clauses. But I love you even more as the prospective father of my child, selected by Nature and approved by my affec-

tion! The former is a self-gratifying passion, the latter a race-duty love!"

Sometimes there comes to one to whom another is trying to give his own viewpoint, a sudden comprehension; an understanding penetrates like a great white light flashing suddenly in the darkness. So Cornelia's explanation gave Keats a new insight into their relation, and at once the justice, the saneness to her of her desire became apparent to him. Suddenly his religious soul, which seemed to find its joy in his love, as a thing separate and distinct from physical attraction, was released at the mother call. At every crisis in life, from the baby with his stomach-ache to the soldier, dying on the battlefield, it is "Mother" whom he calls, and it was this very material mother-thought that brought his body more fully to share his love for Cornelia with his soul.

They became immersed in a new relation, a living soul-passion that vibrated from heart to heart, from soul to soul! An alliance of physical and spiritual forces! Two hearts of clay, smitten deeply with the unappeasable desire of the flesh; two souls of silver, pierced with the gnawing hunger of mother-love and faith's call; turning into the pure and beautiful gold of a mutual love, at the hand of the most ancient of chemists, Cupid!

They were losing their self-consciousness as they renewed their childhood knowledge of each other. Forgotten traits were remembered and unknown intimacies learned. So what seemed strange at first, soon became familiar, and they became emancipated from all shyness. The days passed in reading aloud to each other, strolling in the woods, or idly sitting and talking. They would pass from the crude enjoyments of sensation to the more subtle delights of their cultivated minds.

There was always the half-hidden realization of the uniqueness of their situation. It is a mental phenomenon,

that the individual must always generalize his actions, try to make them fit public opinion. A combination of the Real and the Ideal creates the Beautiful, but the result is not always agreeable to Public Opinion.

"I was just thinking what people would say, if they knew," Cornelia felt constrained to say. They had both carefully avoided all reference to marriage or their future.

"People have unbending, absolute ideas of what others ought to do, and very flexible ones as to their own actions," Keats answered.

"Why should we be narrow as to others and broadminded as to ourselves?"

"I am not, for one. I wish all lovers might have such gratification as we are having."

"But what sort of a world would it be?" she speculated.

"Have you turned into a back-wood's moralist?"

"No, no, only I was wondering, would the world be any worse off, if the shackles of conventionality were thrown away?"

"I don't know. What has seemed best for our fore-fathers, I suppose, is best for the majority to follow," he replied.

"But, thank God, there will always be pioneers in love, those above the ordinary rules of the game."

"I believe morality is what we ourselves believe is right and wrong, and not the preconceived notions of others."

"Philosophizing so early in the day," she laughed. "You would make each one's own individual conscience his guide."

"Yes, the conscience of the modern man or woman is the result of all the thousands of years of thinking, if it has not become competent to judge now, it never will."

"You do not mean that if, for instance, a murderer's conscience approved his act, that he would be morally good?" she inquired with interest.

"Indeed, I do. Take the case of a woman who, in defense

of her honor, kills her attacker. Is she a murderer in anything but name? Leave it to Judge Conscience, he will give his verdict and no court can set it aside."

"It is rather a negative pleasure to discuss such things. Are you trying to justify yourself to this stern Judge?"

He looked down into her face with a serious expression. "If I thought I needed justification, I would not remain here," he quietly rebuked her. "You ought to know that." Her answer was a hug—"a mountain-bear hug," she termed it.

Another evening, Keats and Cornelia sat on the grass, resting their heads against a boulder. She expressed aloud her thoughts: "Beauty is the perfection of knowledge. It is the adaptation of thought to action."

"In other words, we can make any deed beautiful by the thought that controls it," he acquiesced.

She nodded. "I contend that without love we would be living an unholy thing—an unthinkable affair."

"Then it is love that makes all things right?"

"It is the Beauty which arises from a reciprocal love, *that* is the bond of perfection. Love cannot be a one-sided affair to come under the name of Beauty, it must be two-sided," she asserted clearly; "an harmonious love."

"Too many love affairs are unilateral."

"Yes, the man does most of the loving before marriage—and the wife most of it afterwards," she agreed.

"There is no excuse for a husband and wife not continuing to love each other, if they are sure before they take the leap. Whatever it was they saw in each other before, still lives afterward."

"But their viewpoint has changed," she criticised.

"It can be made one by looking through the same glasses. Their love should harmonize the scene," he insisted.

Her head was close to his and from time to time he would run his fingers tenderly through her silken hair.

“Strands of gold,” he murmured in admiring tones.

“My boy is poetic tonight,” she voiced her appreciation.

“I was just thinking what a silken web, like your beautiful hair, the world spun around our actions. It looked as if it had us bound tight with silly old rules, but we tore them aside.”

“Either we must free ourselves and let our lives ripen, or permit them to be held tightly until they wither, decay and rot away,” she said bitterly. “But we will not permit any chains of caste or convention to shackle our soul-child. It must be as free as the air we breathe.”

He seemed very boyish to her as he kissed her, with a rush of emotion at her allusion. She felt much older, though in years she was younger. Lifting her lips to his, their eyes met with an understanding of their mutual love, and its hope of perpetuation.

“You are Beauty incarnate!” he declared with fire in his words.

“And you the depth of Worldly Wisdom!” she returned in adoration.

“Do I look like that?” He sat up in mock surprise.

“Oh, don’t get excited. You are much wiser than you look—you old owl!”

He sank back in satisfaction, “How wise do I appear?”

She smiled as she said, “Wise enough for me. You do not look like a lover—or a priest either for that matter.”

“You know the best soldiers are never warlike; the hardest fighters never lose their tempers. But what do I look like?”

“A school boy. That is just how I want you to look! Eyes that dance with the joy of living, and still show a serious background, remembering the next day’s lessons that must be learned.”

“If I am a school boy, you are my school-girl chum!”

“That is what we were here for years, and that is what we are now. I am going to change the name of this place!”

"What now?" he asked. "You wonderful christener!"

"Soul's Fulfillment!"

"Why, that is just the name for it! How did you ever think of that?"

"I wish I could coin money as easily as names," she explained in appreciation of her own talent.

After dinner it was their custom to walk in the moonlight, and on such an occasion, Cornelia felt the caresses of Keats' eyes even in the darkness. It seemed to her as if his heart were in his eyes and his soul in his lips, as he kissed her.

"I wish you didn't have to go back to those dreary studies," she complained, as they stood in a loving embrace.

"They are my life work," he said sadly.

"And I am only an incident!" she mused in a woeful voice.

"No. You have always been the spirit that permeated my work, the inspiration leading me on."

Again they stepped away from decisions and returned to their love making.

At Clare's request, one bright morning, they climbed a neighboring mountain peak, seeking violets. Following a thread of yellow which stretched like fire through the grass they finally reached a rocky ledge; where they rested, dangling their limbs in the open space.

"I feel as if we were sitting on top of the world," Keats ventured.

"I am Queen of all I survey!" She laughingly waved her hands into space.

"How would you like to be the arbiter of ladies' fashions?" he asked. "That is one throne you could fill."

"I would make motherhood come back into style," was her serious prediction.

"Oh, listen to the lady! She wants to design maternity gowns!"

"They should be the leading style. But alas! they are mostly back numbers!" she regretted.

"They shirk the responsibility," he maintained.

"Because they live over-stimulated lives, unnatural ones. Back to Nature, back to Beauty, should be the modern woman's slogan."

"What of her careers?" he resumed.

"Every woman is ambitious to fulfil her God-given destiny. If she has a voice, why shouldn't she use it? If she can play, it is her duty to inspire. So in every art and field. But she can not restrain her instinct for mating, for motherhood. Because in addition to her usual heritage, there has been added a talent that demands expression, she should not give up one of the fundamental purposes of her existence."

"But Motherhood will hamper her career," was his comment.

"She will overcome every handicap, if you can call it that. I would say, the additional inspiration was greater than any annoyance," Cornelia debated. "I would so love to rescue every woman from her bondage, to let her love as I love, to live as I am living!"

"Too much freedom, my dear, is not good for little souls," he reminded her.

"But it should make them grow bigger, as I feel I am developing."

"Or make them grow smaller," he added sadly.

"Not as yours?" she asked in alarm.

"Frankly, at times my religious training questions whether our actions have been right, or righteous, should I say? I swim along for a time in perfect enjoyment, then I sink in despair, and come up again when I look into your eyes!"

She shuddered as she drew him in to her arms as if to stifle his fears, and murmured her faith: "The force that drew us together is the same as rules the stars in the heavens. Love hallows all!"

And in the love-light that their eyes reflected to each other, they found confidence in the future.

Early one morning towards the end of the month, just as Keats was about to step out of Cornelia's window, Jean came around the corner of the house. Keats drew back into the room as Jean passed by. The latter said, later in the day, that he had been unable to sleep so had arisen early and taken a walk.

When Keats backed into the room, every bit of color was gone from his face. A peculiar, ironical smile played upon it as he said, "Unconventional love must seek secrecy and the dark, the abode of the guilty."

Cornelia, too, had caught a glimpse of Jean. "You are doubting again," she admonished. "I am tired of prodding along your sensitive feelings!"

"My senses need no urging, but my conscience disturbs me at times," Keats retorted. "I do not like the dark."

"Your conscience! What are you losing by this? Think of me," peevishly the girl told him.

"I am afraid of losing my self-respect," he confessed slowly.

She began to cry, for the first time since they had been together. "I suppose I have no self-respect. I am only a terrible vampire who lured you from the path of virtue."

"Now don't be silly," he reproved her. "You know I accepted of my own free will, and I do not regret. I hope I never will! I realize you are quite as much the loser—or the gainer—as I am; but doubts—no one can prevent them."

"You are not very complimentary," she objected.

"We like to neglect our own fields and go to weeding others. We prate of Beauty and Diety but we give our words the lie, by our own actions."

"Oh, you want to practice what you preach, now, I suppose! This is not beautiful, this is not good, what is it then?" she blazed, her eyes flashing fire.

He looked at her in astonishment.

"Why, Cornelia, I had no idea—I did not intend to stir

you so. Calm yourself. I love you—everything is all right. This is the most beautiful time of our lives. I know that—but Jean's coming like that, upset me."

"Oh, you were afraid he would find out?"

"That is unworthy of you, and you know it," he replied calmly. "Fear is the one thing I pride myself on not having. As far as I am concerned, I would not object to telling Jean, or anyone else, about our being here as we are. But the world is not yet ripe for a love relation like ours, pure as it is, yes, holy as it is! For my part, I believe that a legal marriage without mutual love is really immoral, while I do honestly believe that a true love, a mutual love relation such as ours, is moral."

"But it is not best for the majority," she could not but decide nor help saying. "That is why we must keep this secret. It is best for all that the marriage institution be kept inviolate, but there will always be some few who are above all institutions, until the years bring their rights to general recognition."

"It was Man who made the laws, but Woman who established the conventions," was his comment.

"And by centuries of resignation she has come to feel that she must abide by her own creation," said Cornelia.

"A man or a woman who really loves," he clasped her to him, "rises above all restrictions and bounds that keep him, or her, from the object of affection. They stand under the Law of Love only; that law respects the right of the beloved alone to agree or object to the course of action of the other. Most lovers do not fear punishment, but only the conventional consequences. The arrangement of the love relation should be an entirely private affair between them, unless the rights of third parties are affected."

"A third party sometimes does come into the case, furnishing another element."

"Under ordinary conditions that complicates the situation,

of course," he admitted. "But every child, legitimate or illegitimate, has identical rights. The parents owe the same obligation and should have the courage to fulfil it. We have a false viewpoint in such matters."

"We ought to try to restore the ancient love for bodily strength and beauty, and reverence for the divine character of the preservation of the species. There should be no thought of degradation in the continuation of the race, in or out of wedlock; but the love of the senses and the love of the soul should be combined into a single Love Beautiful which colors with rose hues every new being that comes into the world under its light." Cornelia embodied in this summing up, her entire creed.

"I agree with you that the child is holy, even if the love of the parents is profane—as is any relation without love, soul-love. No one disapproves more than I of trial marriages, of all loose relations. They are coarse, soulless lusts. I loathe them! What I am trying to say is, that the helpless children who are not asked if they wish to be born, should not bear the stigma that our present moral code gives them," Keats continued. "The right to motherhood that it denies all women outside of wedlock is wrong, I believe. If circumstances are such that marriage is not possible, or would destroy the purpose of their lives, I think the mother-love should be given outlet and the mutual soul-love be perpetuated. It is always a question of the depth of their feeling." He stopped for a moment and then went on: "I would not be afraid to acknowledge any child of mine, but under the present system, I would have to ask his pardon for doing so."

"Forgive me, dearest, for saying that you were afraid. I know you are far braver than I am. Kiss me! Let us forget everybody again, everything but our own beautiful love."

He kissed away the tears that had come to her eyes in remembrance of her taunting him of his fear, and then returned to his room.

Jean and Cornie had gone for a walk, Clare was busy, and Cornelia and Keats had the morning to themselves. They sat in the shade of an old elm and surrendered each to the mood of the other. They forgot the outside world; remembered only their own love, and sat for hours breathing renewed assurances of their undying devotion.

Suddenly Keats exclaimed: "I can't go back, that's all there is to it! We cannot live without each other, and why should we? Is not our own happiness and that of the little one who will come, more to us than all the rest of the world? Our mutual love has conquered me!"

She drew him to her with a sigh, but could not speak.

"There is a happiness that makes one afraid," she whispered. "It is too good to be true. I am afraid I will wake up and find your words only my imaginings."

"You *will* marry me?" For a moment a fear clutched his heart that she would refuse the conventional denouement of their romance.

She smiled, "Will I? You can just bet I will! Maybe you think I like this free-love stuff, but I don't—no woman does—no matter what she says! But 'all is fair in love' and in—"

"The selection of the father of one's children," he mocked her former vehemence. "Behold the Personally Selected offering himself to the Selector!"

"I suppose you feel like the sacrificial lamb."

"One escaped now and then. No chance for me," he retorted.

"I'll say there isn't. I've *got* you tight."

"But I was hard *to get*! You'll admit that," was his comeback.

"You certainly were. Shall we tell the folks?"

Keats agreed and they took the news to their elders.

"We have not had our eyes closed," Clare said. They both glanced quickly at her, but saw she only meant their outward attitude.

After the others had gone Jean said to Keats, "I am not surprised." As their eyes met, Keats knew that he had not avoided Jean's keen eyes that morning.

"I am not going to lecture you, my boy. All I want to tell you, is that you took a very long time to make up your mind; and further that, after what I saw that morning, if you had not told us what you now have, you never would have gotten away from here alive, that's all;" he laughed good-naturedly; "but I knew what was coming, so I had no fear of having to use violence."

"Good old Dad!" was all Keats could say.

Later when Jean and Clare were alone, they discussed the strange situation.

"What a tenacity of purpose, what a stubborn retention of her soul desire!" Clare declared.

"It shows what the released soul can do," Jean deduced.

"But is it always wise to have our soul wishes fulfilled?" his wife asked.

"No, that is the great fear I have had. Once released, the soul can accomplish either good or evil. It is not of itself one or the other."

"Sort of neutral," Clare commented.

"It is as pure white, ready to be colored in accordance with the desire that actuates it," Jean added. "We should acquire a sense of sober responsibility. Like all forces, once released its power is limitless. It has the ability to renovate all human relations."

Mother Justine, when told of Keats' intention to give up his studies for the priesthood, wisely said, "If his heart is elsewhere than in his work, it is best for him to relinquish it, before he takes his final vows and finds it too late."

"But what a splendid priest he would have made!" Sister Grace could not restrain a sigh of regret.

"The Church's loss is another's gain," was her Superior's answer. "The family, the marriage relation, is the foundation of all."

"You never complain, Mother, but see good in everything."

"I have come to know, that all things are for the best; that our souls will have their way, no matter what we may do. Why not accept things as they are? This world, and the people in it, are really not so bad as some of us like to believe."

"A comfortable philosophy," the sister observed.

"To me at any rate," Mother Justine replied, with an amused shrug.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

IN THE CHAPEL of the building where so many important events of her life had occurred, St. Mary's Academy, on a hot August day, Cornelia was united in marriage to Keats. That it be celebrated there was the wish of both Mother Justine and Sister Grace, who were present with the others of the family.

The newlyweds honey-mooned at Long Beach and planned their future. Keats decided to become a Knights of Columbus secretary.

"My work will be both religious and secular," he told his wife. "I will be a teacher as well as a preacher, and will help to bring beauty into the lives of many."

They took an apartment in New York and Cornelia hurled herself into Woman's Club work, specializing on Motherhood problems.

One evening at the dinner table, she was telling Keats of the sad case of an unmarried mother whom she had aided.

"I do not blame her in the least," she asserted; "marriage was impossible. Conventions are only made to be broken, anyway."

"Conventions?" Keats shrugged his shoulders. "Listen, as my wife, you must promise never to break the—the conventions."

"There you are, taking on the respectabilities of an old married man, already!" she laughed. "I will have you understand, that you will not be lord and master of my soul! I think I have demonstrated in my own life, that the mere words of the marriage ceremony do not make the couple who stand before the priest—man and wife."

"I know—what is your stock phrase? Oh—yes—mutual

love—that is what we have—isn’t it?” he came back with a grin.

“Mutual love—that is what binds one to another. But it leaves the souls equal, one not above the other.”

“Granted! But I know yours will rule mine!”

“Beauty must govern both our souls!” she replied. “It is the lack of the perception of the beauty in life, even in the daily contact of married people, that causes so many romances to go on the Rocks of Unhappiness.”

“We will surely steer clear of them,” he asserted.

Clare and Jean went South for the winter. On their return in the Spring, they stopped in New York for a few weeks.

“I have kept a surprise for you,” Cornelia told them at a dinner party at which her husband and father were the other guests.

“I love surprises,” Clare said.

“You will be astonished to hear what a splendid teacher daddy has become,” Cornelia informed them.

“Indeed,” Clare remarked, “I never thought of him as a teacher.”

Cornie laughed. “I expect you will say, like Jonah did to the whale after he was inside it, ‘This never would have happened if you had kept your mouth shut.’ ”

“You never did do that,” she retorted. “But what and where do you teach? We can not stand the suspense much longer!”

“The beauty of the human form—at the Institute of Arts.”

“You have had plenty of experience with the female branch,” she could not restrain saying.

Jean did not like the trend of the conversation. “A sort of sculptor’s course?” he asked.

“Not entirely. I have a sculptor and an artist assisting me, and living models to make the lectures clear.”

“Dad has really broadened in his old Beauty Cult,” Cor-

nelia asserted. "He realizes the spiritual essence in every beautiful feature of the body, and you would be astonished how he brings out these points in his lectures. There is a certain model," she said with a merry twinkle in her eyes, "a little curley-headed doll whose beauty has helped daddy a great deal."

Clare smiled, "I was waiting for the catch. I knew it would come."

"Now I don't want you to make fun of little Lily Leiter—she is as good as she is beautiful," Cornelia protested.

"Certainly, my dear," Clare agreed; "but Cornie can admire the good as well as the beautiful."

"Someone has said that Goodness and Beauty are identical," Cornie ventured.

"There is a beauty in Purity, a freshness in Innocence, that mere Worldliness cannot conceive," Keats contrived to say.

His wife looked at him, but made no reply.

"All Beauty must have the same root of identity," Jean responded. "For all Beauty comes from God. But there is the same difference between a Spiritual Beauty and Worldly Beauty as between the white rose and the red rose, both have the same root of identity, are earth born and heaven seeking."

"I am afraid my father will take the fatal step again," was Cornelia's casual utterance.

She was not prepared for his excited reply: "And why not? Am I to go through the rest of my life alone, because of my past misfortunes?"

"You surely ought to know your own mind by this time," Clare told him.

"I *do* like Lily," Cornie admitted. "She is so fairy-like, she seems like my better spirit."

"I didn't know you had one," Clare ventured.

"I am going to ask her to marry me!" Cornie confessed openly.

"Don't worry as to her reply," Cornelia comforted him.

"What is there about you to attract such a girl?" Jean asked.

"Kind, sweet words, those; but I am thick skinned. I will tell you," he vaunted lightly, "it is my indescribable charm!"

"O, my conceited father," Cornelia declared. "He thinks he is an Apollo. It's his cave-man methods—that's what it is!"

"I think he has a magic wand," Keats gave as his viewpoint. "He conjures up a little fairy and then hypnotizes her into loving him. Tell us the secret."

"An old man's darling—you know—there is an attraction," Cornelia maintained.

"In a few years you will be old and bent and she fluttering like a young bird. May and November can never meet!" Jean urged.

"You jealous creatures!" Cornie shouted. "I will be happy in spite of everything. Just watch me. I am going to meet her now, good-bye." He ran like a boy to show them he was not as old as they thought.

"He's a wonder!" Jean commented.

The conversation of the early evening seemed to determine Cornie's course of action. After he had called for his Lily and she sat next to him in his car, he looked at her with worshipping eyes. Her filmy gown was of violet hue, silver gleaming beneath it; a dainty little wisp of a bonnet topped her yellowish, almost white hair, and her tiny features. She was like a Dresden china figurette.

He could not restrain a compliment. "Like Aphrodite rising in beauty from the fairy foam of the sea, with the mists about her," he said solemnly.

"Oh, you flatterer!" she chided him. "Because you see me pose, is no reason to call me Aphrodite."

"She was the ancient Goddess of Beauty. You have translated my mental vision of her into your being."

"I think you are perfectly wonderful," she breathed. "You know so much. Poor little me, I try to remember everything I hear, but I forget when to use it."

"You simple little child," he soothed her. "It is your very naturalness that is your charm, and your beautiful face and figure. God doesn't want you to work your little brain too hard."

"Little brain—well, I like that!" she objected with a pout.

"You know how I meant it. Simplicity has a charm all its own. You are young, you have plenty of time to broaden yourself."

"Broaden myself? I don't want to get fat!"

He laughed, "I like you just as you are now."

"But I must bore you!"

"Bore me? I am never my real self except when I am with you. There is a magic elixir in your very presence that brings back my youth. The spring and summer of my life are past, I am now in the autumn. Will you help me to enjoy it, and with me watch it fade into winter?"

There crept into his voice a cadence that made it a love-song of maturity rather than youth, and she caught the sweet sadness that his words portrayed.

"I want to help you," she cooed. "But what can I do?"

"Everything—you can be my companion—my wife!"

"Oh, I never thought of such a thing!"

"Am I too old?"

"No—no—not that—"

"Have you heard of my other marriages?"

"Yes—no—that is, of course I know Mrs. Keats Wildner is your daughter."

Pitilessly he confessed his past: "You must know before you give me your answer. My first wife was Clare—my brother Jean is married to her now. I loved her. She cared only for him. He was a dreamer—she was afraid he would not give her the luxuries she craved. She married

me for what I could give her and I found it out—too late. I made her my Love Toy!" he became vehement, almost forgetting his companion. "I played with her until I tired of her, then I threw her aside, like a broken plaything. She went to my brother. I secured a divorce."

Lily shuddered. She pictured herself also tossed aside, after a little while. They reached a park, and he suggested they get out and sit on a bench for a time. After they were seated, he continued:

"Clare was selfish, cruel, and I became the same." He paused. "My second was Meta, Cornelia's mother. I did not love *her* until just before I married her. She had always loved me. She mothered me, and I learned in the short time we were married, to care for her fondly—She died when our baby came—I have never forgotten her. She was the one lasting thing in my life. I feel she still looks after me."

Lily looked at this man, with his paradoxical emotions, in a new light. He was not the carefree admirer after all.

"My third—"

Her eyes opened wide in astonishment. "His *third*—how many wives did he have?" she asked herself.

"My third was Christine—a Follies girl. 'The Golden Sphinx,' I called her. She never talked, unless she had to. I used to think, 'If only she would say something!' And when she did—'If only she would keep quiet!' Her language was impossible, her demands continuous. Finally, she left me for a man with more money. I let her get the divorce. I never loved her, I was caught in the web of her beauty and the glamour of the footlights."

"Were there others?" she could not hold back her fears.

"No, not wives; but sweethearts; yes, mistresses," he came out boldly, determined that she should know all, from him alone.

"And now?" she questioned naively.

"Now, I am a different man—I once had a dreadful affliction. I was blind for a time, and just then my daughter was lost, she ran away from school!"

His voice broke with the recollection. "I realized that there was something more to life than personal gratification. I felt a touch of this when my wife Meta, died, but, well I tried to drown my sorrow and succeeded. It was different when I couldn't see. The very eyes of my soul seemed to open then. So I love you differently than I have ever loved before. There is no one but you now. It seems as if there never was anyone but you."

"Are you sure you really *love* me?"

"I am, but differently than you may think. I respect you, because I know you are a good girl in every sense of the word. I worship you, as I do the wonders of Nature. I love you, as I do life itself!"

Lily hesitated to speak after this outburst—she was overcome by wonder at his love.

He thought to bring her back to earth by seeming to be natural. "There is a peculiar proceeding in the Catholic Church," he said, "when a new saint is proposed to be canonized. A Devil's Advocate is appointed, whose duty it is to advance every possible argument against canonization. So I have been the Devil's Advocate against myself."

"You are very honest," was all she could manage to say.

"There is also appointed, a God's Advocate," he whispered, "who must suggest all favorable facts in favor of canonization."

"Let me be God's Advocate," she whispered in turn, "and tell you that you are the only one who can fill my heart."

"Notwithstanding all I have told you?" he insisted.

"Yes, you have been as much wronged, as wronging, in your marital affairs, and your love of Beauty has been your greatest fault—if it is a fault." And then, "Are you sure you want a silly little girl like me?"

"Want you? I crave for you!" he pressed her in his arms with as ardent feeling as any youth.

"I will be true to you, dearest!" he declared. "You need never worry about any other woman coming into my life now. You are all woman—all femininity! I have tasted several beverages, but you are my Fountain of Youth!"

"Oh, I *do* hope I can make you happy."

"I will give you the very simple recipe. All you have to do, is to be your own sweet self," he advised her.

"You know so little about me." She began her desire to confess too.

"I know all," he stopped her; "that you lost your parents, were alone in the world—came here to try to become famous in the movies; but only succeeded in being an extra and finally became an artists' model. You see I have looked you up."

She laughed. "There really is little to tell. You see I never have lived like you, I have only touched the outer rim of life."

"With me you shall see it again, that is, all that is beautiful and good."

"Oh, I want to see everything! At times I have felt so cramped."

"Never again must you let yourself get into that mood. We will travel, you shall see it all under my protection," he added paternally.

"What a restful feeling, to have someone to love and protect you!" she sighed.

The news of their engagement occasioned no surprise to Cornie's family, but brought out some caustic comments.

"I wonder if she knows of his other marriages?" Cornelia asked herself, but concluded it was not her affair to give the information.

Clare, however, feared that Lily might endure what she had, and felt it her duty to say to her, "Do you know that Cornie has been married several times?"

"He told me everything," was the sharp answer. "I think he has been more sinned against than sinning."

"A partisan already," Clare thought; "very well, I wash my hands of her!"

"He has caught a new and rare little love bird with the same old net," was the way Jean expressed his view to his wife. "I wonder how long he will hold her."

"I *do* hope you will be happy, Dad," Cornelia sincerely told him. "You surely have had an exciting life, but has it been a happy one?"

"I don't know, my child. Each time I was wed, I thought I had reached the Seventh Heaven of Delight, only to be rudely thrown down into the depths of Hell! But still, if I could measure the real happiness I have had, with the sorrow, I suppose I would do the same thing over again. They say one moment of perfect happiness is worth a life-time of sorrow. I have found that to be true."

"Life is very complex, Daddy."

"But we have lived, you and I, Cornelia!" he exulted. "We have not vegetated like so many. We have enjoyed, we have suffered, we have lived!"

"I sometimes question whether action is life, any more than thought is life. Uncle Jean, in the quiet calm of his mountains, has lived as much as we have, in the whirl of the world."

"It is the passing from the sense to the soul and from the soul to the sense, that constitutes life," was the reply.

"From sense to soul—from the ordinary to the unusual—from the transitory to the eternal—that is the path of man's growth."

"I think we are all instinctively spiritual, whether we will or not. Only it takes a stronger magnet to draw some out than others. With me, it was Meta's death, my affliction, and your loss. I have been a different man ever since, although outwardly, I probably seemed the same, or worse."

"In my case, it was my love for Keats, that brought out my deep mother-love, for the satisfaction of which, I would have willingly given my life," confessed Cornelia.

It was Jean's remark that surprised Cornelia, when she asked him what he thought of the engagement, after he had met Lily. "It will be the marriage of Heaven and Hell," he said in his quiet unassuming way, "the union of Spirit and Flesh! A baby, an innocent—to a man of the world, a *roué*. And both have the uncurbed desires of their kind."

Once again Cornie took the marriage vows and was tied to Lily Leiter by the same knot from which he had so often slipped. With his fourth wife, he was as considerate as a father to his daughter. In fact, she seemed more like his child than his wife. To protect her, to instruct her, to make her happy was his constant aim. And she almost venerated him, he was the whole of life to her!

A short time after his marriage, Cornie met Eddie in the Astor lobby where the latter was waiting for his wife.

"Lots of news, Eddie!" was his greeting.

"Out with it—I feel like a blotter—ready to soak it in."

"Congratulate me twice!"

"Twice—you didn't marry twins!"

"Not exactly—but I am married again."

"To the sweetest, most perfect girl in the world, I suppose. That's what you always said."

"It's true, nevertheless. Lily is her name—Lily Leiter."

"Lily? Lilies are for the pure!"

"Oh, is that so! Well, straw-flowers are for crusty old bachelors!"

"Straw-flowers? Dried herring are the kind of sweet posies my wife reminds me of!"

"Look at me, Eddie! I am going to be a grandfather, soon!"

"A grandfather! You—ho ho! That's too good. The gay Lothario is going to toddle his grandchildren on his

knees! Cornie, the old paymaster of the Follies' chorus, in a new role! The next thing I'll hear, the sweet Lily has presented you with triplets—three little lilies!"

"It's possible, Eddie, you never can tell."

"Grand-daddy, eh! Cornelia and Keats—well it will be a Wildner anyway."

"It surely is strange how the little one will really be like Jean's and mine, both," Cornie added.

"A regular family party!" Eddie termed it.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

CORNELIA's first questioning glance to the nurse, after the birth of her child, was met by the simple statement—"A boy!" And when she was permitted to hold the wee mite close to her breast for just a moment, she murmured, "Keats, Junior!"

This was the golden moment of consummation of her dreams, the achievement of her hopes, the fulfillment of her longings! But there was another golden moment, that of the beginning, the time of her first active decision just a summer ago, when in the Catskills she stepped over the window sill from the night of her desire to the dawn of her realization. And there was still another golden moment of beginning, when in the old halls of St. Mary's she boldly put into words her determination to gain the end she had now reached. And yet farther back, the golden chain extended, into her childhood, into her maidenhood days, those many golden moments when the inanimate dolls were to her living, breathing objects of her affection, and Keats their god-like father! Nay more, back to the first Eve there stretches an endless chain of golden time, holding all women to the fulfillment of their birthright and binding them to their children in the holiest of all bonds, links that are never, never broken! In the Heaven of Motherhood are many Cities of Refuge, where world-weary, society-tired, intellectually exhausted women find havens of rest, love and contentment as they clasp to their breasts new lives; as, later, baby arms make a circle of love about them, and finally, strong hands protect and shelter them!

Keats enjoyed watching the new expressions on his wife's face as she observed their little one's development. Her

own soul seemed to expand with that of the child. He was surprised, too, how anxious he was to get home to his son from the K. of C. building, and how reluctant to leave him.

The walls of "Soul's Desire" once more reverberated with familiar footsteps. Clare and Jean took up again the old quiet life of the Catskills. Cornelia and Keats, with little Keats, as soon as he was old enough to be taken along, spent most of their week-ends with them. Frequently the Rabbi and Enoch Glynn, and occasionally Mother Justine and Sister Grace visited them.

It was on one of the rare occasions when the little group of relatives and friends happened all to arrive on the same day, that they gathered on the porch in front of the house.

"I often wonder, Aunt Mary," Cornelia addressed the Mother by her family name, "if my temperament would have been the same, had my mother lived. You know, from my earliest remembrance, I looked upward for her in all my childish dreams and play, I felt responsible to no one but her. It made me sort of wild and expanded my soul."

"Undoubtedly, my child, the conditions that surround us from our birth, even to our death, influence our lives to a great extent," the Mother reasoned.

"And chance plays a large part, too," Sister Grace added.

"Indeed, yes," her Superior agreed. "Had you not happened into my office some time ago, when my family was in the midst of a conference, their whole lives might have been different."

"Well, what about heredity?" Glynn asked. "Isn't that something we cannot altogether control?"

"It is what our fathers and our ancestors have been, that makes us what we are," Jean agreed.

"But our racial instincts, our religious past, really form our characters." The Rabbi promulgated his Laws of Fate.

"The soul dominates all," Cornelia declared. "Thank God for giving me a soul capable of expansion!"

"How much has happened since we used to gather here like this!" Jean suggested.

"Life draws some together for a little time, and then scatters them like seeds. The wonder is, that we who are here should be on earth at all at the same time," the Rabbi said.

"It is strange that just We, Us, and Company, should tread the green earth together—and how our paths diverge!" Glynn echoed.

"Think of the generations who have gone before, and will come after us! We are only sandwiched in between the past and the future," Clare reminded them.

"After us, the deluge!" Glynn mocked her.

"No, after us, a higher civilization," objected Sister Grace. "We are stepping stones to the next generation."

"Life's highest duty is to the child," Mother Justine added.

"Let's take a little walk," Cornelia suggested to Mother Justine, who quickly accepted the invitation.

When they were out of hearing of the others, Cornelia exclaimed, "Isn't it just wonderful, how my life is working out? How my soul desires have been fulfilled!"

"All life is marvelous in its development," the Mother replied noncomittally, as she nodded her head.

"Do you know that Keats and I belonged to each other before we were married," the younger woman whispered in confession to her aunt.

"Jean told me."

"I know you will not admit it, but you can see now, that I meant what I said," Cornelia continued: "If we had let the old-fashioned conventions hold us back, our whole lives might have been different."

"You fail to realize the difference between social conventions and moral laws. For example, some mothers become very much upset if their daughters wear very short skirts, forgetting that their own mothers complained as strenuously when their daughters rode bicycles in bloomers. Those are

conventions, fashions! And there are fashions in marriages as well as clothing, but no moral law is broken in the latter. But when the unmarried girl loses her chastity, then a moral law is broken; when the married woman becomes an adulteress, a commandment is shattered! There is a great distinction," the Nun explained.

"But the Decalogue has been ruined by our present-day civilization!" Cornelia protested.

"The ten commandments still exist and are still the law, notwithstanding many have read them out of their lives."

"You would not have me regret?" Cornelia persisted.

"I would it were a holier recollection. The truth must be kept from your child. 'The secret pleasure turns to open shame.' That very fact shows its fallacy."

"Only because of the conventional viewpoint!" Cornelia defended herself.

"No, on account of the moral code!"

"But when marriage seems impossible?"

"It is never so, unless it is best that it should be."

"That is the old doctrine of an unchangeable fate for each."

"No, it is the compensatory rule, that we must reap what we sow. If we have so placed ourselves that marriage seems impossible, it is our own doing and we must abide by our action, if we cannot alter the situation by moral and legal means."

"Yes, suffer needlessly, I suppose," Cornelia complained.

"A great deal of suffering is useless, and caused by our own follies. We must face life squarely and not try to get around it."

"I insist that one must have freedom of choice in planning his life. What of the two million surplus women in England? Are they to be denied the crowning glory of woman-kind, the fulfillment of their God-given destiny? Why should we beat our wings against the cage wherein we may

be confined, if the gate is open through which we can fly?"

"Those who refuse to do so often enjoy their lives more than the highfliers, so called. There is a joy in doing one's duty, which seldom permits the bird to grasp the opportunity for apparent escape. That is as brave as pioneering."

"But there is a great satisfaction in pioneering—moral pioneering! The higher we soar, the smaller we appear to those who cannot fly!"

"Free love is not that kind of pioneering, of soaring! Its honey turns to gall; its joy to grief!" the Nun censured.

"The natural selection of the father of one's children is such a spirit, I contend," Cornelia disputed strenuously.

"I will grant you that perhaps a woman may be justified in proposing marriage to a man whom she believes to be ideally fitted to be the father of her children, if she loves him and knows that he reciprocates her love. The rule that requires the male to propose is not a moral law, but only a social convention made ancient and honorable by long usage."

"But if the man happens to be tied to some life-work, as Keats was, which seemed to make marriage impossible?"

"Ah, seemed, that is just the word—seemed to make it impossible—but it was not! Had either of you realized that your love was so great, that it would ultimately take him from his studies, you never would have acted as you did or made your desire for motherhood a shield for an unholy passion. You should have waited to be sure of yourselves."

"Have we not repaid society for our moral lapse by our marriage?"

"We do not cheat society, we lower our own resistance, by allowing our appetites to dominate us! We do not repay society, we conquer ourselves, when we regain our own lost estimation. We exalt ourselves alone, or we debase our souls!"

"But mine was not degraded, it was raised, liberated!"

"So you thought at the time, but there always comes a moment when unlawful excess brings its own penalty!"

"What would you have had me do? Surrender, or fight for my soul desire?" Cornelia demanded.

"Fight, but openly and squarely! or surrender to the right! Consider not punishment, but consequences, to yourself and others. Make your goal a just one, and your fight a clean one. You never can reach any heaven by groveling in the dirt."

"But one must not shirk because the road is unknown!"

"You thought it new, but it is a very old one. It was a very imperfect substitute you used. You lowered your ideal, when you brought your lover to the same plane of earthly surrender as yourself. You both climbed back, the Law of Life gives you that opportunity. Very often—no, most often—they sink lower, for that same law breaks many, but it cannot itself be broken."

"Oh, I do thank God, that we did climb back! That the Law of Life did not destroy us!" Cornelia shuddered as she said this.

They returned to the house and joined the others for the evening meal.

The nuns departed directly after leaving the table, as they were anxious to get back to the convent.

The remainder of the party made themselves comfortable on the porch and enjoyed the moonlight glow over the mountains. An unearthly calm and peace filled the air. There seemed no need for conversation. Nature had the floor.

Cornelia and Keats were accustomed to arise early while at "Soul's Desire," but one morning the latter was somewhat lazy and remained in bed, to "stretch my weary bones," he put it. Cornelia was seated at the window of their room, a lemon-colored negligee draping her slender figure. She paused in the operation of drawing stockings of the same shade over her shapely limbs as she looked up at her husband and said coquettishly: "How do you love me?"

"As only one man can love one woman, with all the in-

tensity of his body and all the earnestness of his soul! Such love can be restrained for a time, but sooner or later it will break all bonds, burn through all impediments and reach its destiny in a heaven of realization."

He had expressed all the pent-up emotions of her own soul.

"That is what release of the soul means, the power to gain your goal against a world of obstacles," she explained.

"Marriage is a means of purifying the passions!" he said fervently.

"Passion needs no cleansing," she objected. "It merely gets unruly at times."

"And must be held in leash——"

"If it can be; rather, direct it along approved lines so long as the majority remain as narrow as they are to-day," she continued.

"The soul desire, if strong enough, will force Passion to take the conventional road," he declared; "but, thank God, there will always be some venturesome souls who will climb the side paths of unconventionality, and dare to blaze their own trail. The gift of passion is God's greatest gift to man! He never really lives, who knows no passionate love—of woman—of man—of the good—of the beautiful—of God!"

He arose and folded her in his arms. "We surely love each other with such a love," she declared.

"If there is an example of the restrainer of passion, it is the priest; and I truthfully can assure you that I tried to live up to that reputation."

"If there is any exponent of expression of passion, it is the artist! Once I was an artists' model you know—I tried not to destroy her reputation," she stated.

"Repression and expression united, give what?" he inquired.

"A sort of calm enjoyment, neither hard nor soft, hot nor cold, black nor white, a slushy, lukewarm, gray pleasure!" she responded.

"That is why my repression could not stand. It had to give way before the greater force of your expression. And it has given us a passionate, beautiful love, that means the fulfillment of our every hope and desire."

"It almost frightens me," she protested.

"You afraid? Unthinkable!" he replied.

"You reach such dizzy heights in your dreams, I am terrified lest I fall down."

"I will be there to catch you," he said. "I do not fear to face the future with you. We have not winced in the past, and surely our heads will not be bowed now."

"I will be courageous, for there is so much to be dared," she agreed.

"What courage these sun-kissed mountains instill into one!" he exclaimed.

"How good God is, to let us have some great incentive in life!" Cornelia declared as she rested in her husband's arms.

Every man finds a new world, when he discovers a dominant purpose for his life—an all-impelling motive. Until he does this, he fluctuates and passes to and fro in life's struggle. His soul does not know its own desire and is enchained. He builds, and is astonished at his power—and destroys the next day and cares not—for his building was but for the day. But when he apprehends his life purpose, recognizes the goal he seeks, finds his soul's desire, he ceases to sway one way and another and proceeds on the certain road to real accomplishment.

The verandah of "Soul's Desire" bounded the house proper on four sides and was called the "Promenade deck," as the guests often made the circuit in couples, passing each other on the way around. Cornie and his wife were walking in one direction and Jean and Clare in the other when they met in front of the swing in which Keats and Cornelia were seated, as the nurse came out of the house with little Keats in her arms. "My own darling!" the mother called, in an

ecstasy of love. "Come to us—our Beauty. You are my Soul's Desire, the World's Soul Desire!"

She kissed him as she hugged him to her. Keats took and held the little one over her head. "The crown of Motherhood!" he whispered.

"In the real marriage relation is the ultimate beauty. The family legally tied—religiously bound—lovingly united—is the anchor of humanity!" came out from the fullness of Jean's soul.

"Soul-Mates and Heart-Mates!" Clare cried, as she walked up to them, resting an arm on each, as if uniting them all. "I was thinking of olden times. Your little family, Keats, is the real culmination of the old theories of life, that you have so often heard us talk about." Jean and Cornie nodded.

"Be true to your soul-desires!" Jean admonished.

"And constant to your heart-calls," Cornie added.

"But seek to unify the two," Clare told them with unusual intensity.

"You mean self-expression—that is true happiness," Keats explained her statement.

"To enjoy the beautiful, to hope, to pray, are the cardinal precepts of self-expression," Jean explained, in the deeper knowledge of his maturity.

"And the most important of these?" Keats inquired.

"To enjoy the Beautiful. It covers all experience—everything," Jean answered.

"But does it include Innocence?" Cornelia asked her husband with a quizzical glance.

"To enjoy the Beautiful to the utmost, Man must see—must feel—through innocent eyes—through the soul of his own child!" was his fervent reply. "*Souls are only satisfied with Souls as their Toys.*"

From THE WORLD OF PASSION, THE UNIVERSE OF BUSINESS and THE CONTINENT OF SOUL LIFE, Men and Women are ever starting on their life journeys. Soon they are caught in the shower of meteoric rocks and stones thrown off from CLASHING WORLDS; ambition, lust, jealousy, deceit, hit them; bruise them; recreate them!

Seeking the Harbor of Forgetfulness, they roam THE SEAS OF PLEASURE until they are landed on THE MOUNTAINS OF LOVE by SHIFTING WINDS, which have hurled them to and fro like whisps of straw!

In THE WHIRLPOOL OF FATE, the immortal soul, like an impassive Buddha, regards its playthings: Men and Women sinking in the water's swirl to a bottomless pit of unsatiated desires; rising on the waves of attained wishes; circling through Birth, Love, Marriage, Divorce, Death, back to Birth again; dashing one against the other! Strange encounters! Wives and mistresses—Nuns and prostitutes—Priests and libertines—Saints and sinners! *Soul Toys* for the Unborn!

And above, THE HEAVEN OF MOTHERHOOD beckons to all women and demands the veneration of all mankind! The light of the tiny child-stars shining there will lead the undaunted voyagers at last to CITIES OF REFUGE from the Storms of Life.

To-day all Humanity is struggling and striving to release its soul from the shackles of Materialism, War, and Industrial Strife that the Coming Generation may be conceived in Love—born with eyes open to Beauty—christened under Religion's protecting wing and find the full fruition of righteous soul desires when the Spirit of Heaven shall rule the Man of Dust!













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